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**THE DEPICTION OF GERMANS IN BRITISH FILMS:  
HOW IT CHANGES, HOW FAR SUCH CHANGES REFLECT  
GOVERNMENT POLICY AND PUBLIC OPINION**

**By**

**MYRA LESLEY CROSS BA (HONS), MA (HONS)**

**Degree submitted for: Doctor of Philosophy**

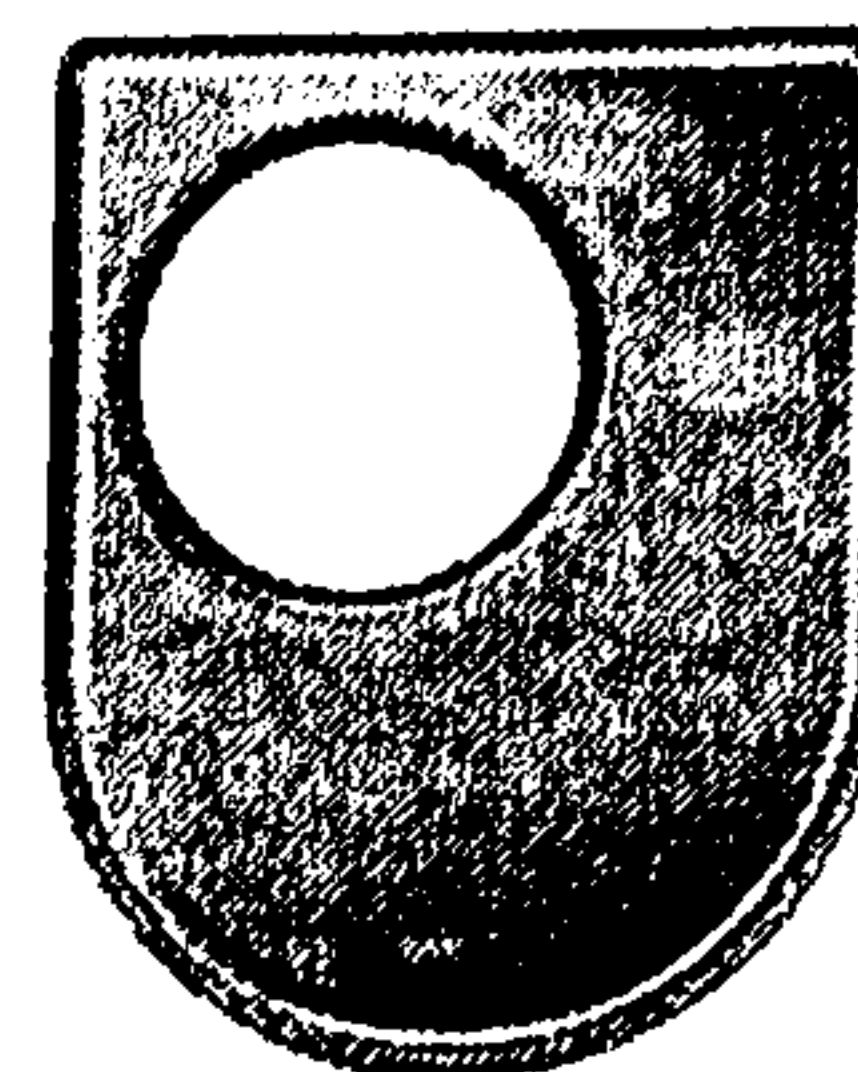
**Department of History**

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EX12

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines British attitudes to the German people during and immediately after the Second World War. This is focussed on the opinions of Service personnel obtained through the examination of diaries, letters, memoirs and other papers held at the Imperial War Museum archive. These private views are contrasted with the image depicted in the mass medium of film, a very popular form of entertainment during the years discussed. Films are examined from the pre-war period, to show the image of Germans current during the 1930s, with a brief discussion of how censorship affected what could be shown. Then wartime films are considered, and finally films for the period up to 1955. 1955 was chosen as a cut-off date as that was the year Germany was admitted as a member of NATO. The conclusion suggests that Service personnel, even during the wartime period, varied considerably in their attitude to the enemy; there was admiration for Rommel, for example, and for some a feeling of comradeship in arms, although this did not extend to the S.S. and the Gestapo. Pre-war films tended to be uncritical of Germans, partly due to the censor's refusal to admit open censure of German internal politics. Once war was declared a nuanced examination of the Nazi regime, such as *Pastor Hall*, could be produced, although most wartime films show Germans in terms of the stereotype which evolved before the First World War, that of a militarised, faceless mass. With the war's end this image began to change to a more sympathetic portrayal which could revert to that of the honourable opponent popular before 1939, and could even refer to German suffering. This change is linked to geo-political shifts, but also to the views of troops who occupied Germany in the immediately post-war period.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the staff of the British Library and the National Archive, Public Record Office, for their assistance, with especial thanks to the staff of the Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, and the British Film Institute Library. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor Tony Aldgate for all his help and advice; also my husband, Angus Cross, and the rest of my family; and my friends, Veronica Davies, Judi Leighton, Sally Dux and Joy Payne for their advice and support.

## INTRODUCTION

*Ernest Bevin said of the Germans: 'I try to be  
fair to them but I 'ates them really'<sup>1</sup>*

The Second World War is an ever-present element in British culture: factual and fictional television and radio programmes based on the events of this war are frequently broadcast; British war films turn up regularly in the television schedules and copies are readily available to buy; most bookshops stock a number of volumes on the Nazi period in Germany, with little or no cover of Germany post-1945. Thus the British tend to view the Germans through the distorting mirror of a set of stereotypes current during a war which ended more than sixty years ago and which themselves pre-date the First World War. This has serious implications: in wartime, there is 'a need to produce an image of a hated enemy'<sup>2</sup> leading to a stereotype emphasising the enemy's unattractive qualities, especially their brutality; this justifies brutal behaviour by one's own side as a necessary evil required to defeat such an enemy<sup>3</sup>; this harking back to the 1940s has unhappy effects on Anglo-German relations. The importance of the Second World War in British popular culture is good justification for examining the issue of British attitudes to the Germans during and around the wartime period.

This thesis will look at British attitudes to the Germans from 1930 to 1955. The period of the 1930s provides a basis from which to examine continuities and changes during the wartime and immediate post-war periods. 1955 has been chosen as a cut-off date:

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans under the British 1945-1950*, London, Peter Owen, 2001, p.54.

<sup>2</sup> J. Glenn Gray, quoted in Margaret Kertesz, *The Enemy: British Images of the German People During the Second World War*, unpublished thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Sussex, September 1992, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.



on 9 May 1955 Germany was admitted into NATO, and the German Armed Forces reformed. It can be seen as the date when the Federal Republic of Germany was readmitted to the community of western nations, a form of acknowledgement, however reluctant, that the FDR was part of the Western anti-Communist alliance (East Germany, was, of course, part of the Communist bloc and so remained the enemy), no longer a threat but an essential ally.

I will focus on the opinions and attitudes of members of the Armed Forces taken from examination of the Imperial War Museum (IWM) archives. While much has been written about the serviceman during the period in question, the issue of attitudes to the enemy tends to be dealt with in passing rather than looked at in detail. Many Servicemen did not show any particular interest in the character of the enemy – it was enough that Germans were ‘the other side’. I have therefore confined my discussion to those who expressed definite opinions about their antagonists: thus much of the material relied upon comes from those who had direct contact with Germans, either as prisoners-of-war or as members of the occupying forces in Germany. Since most of these were in the Army, I will use the term soldiers to include members of the other two Services. While limiting in some respects – there is little information about the pre-war opinions held – this selection provides the opportunity to examine the attitudes of those for whom the Germans ceased to be ‘a strange enemy people’ but became a familiar group among which the soldier lived and worked, and to see how far, if at all, this interaction affected attitudes. These men wrote home and so their views were disseminated; in at least one case (Charters<sup>4</sup>), the tone and format of his letters suggests that, although addressed to his wife, he expected them to be shown to a wider audience, possibly the congregation of his local church – he would seem to have been a devout

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<sup>4</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, C.J. Charters papers (Conshelf).

Roman Catholic. One would expect their correspondents to discuss matters with other people; thus what are personal views could reach a wider audience. While much has been written about the role of the Services and the serviceman during the wartime period, there is little discussion of the role of the ordinary soldier in relation to the occupation of Germany and the examination of such views forms part of the original contribution of this study.

There were a limited number of papers available which dealt with Germans, and I was unable, due to time constraints, to examine them all: the views expressed in this thesis are therefore based on a small and selected sample. However, it was never intended to attempt any form of statistical sampling of servicemen's opinions; the evidence is not available to enable this to be done. The group of papers I have examined demonstrate a variety of views and attitudes which it is considered give some insight into how the Germans were regarded during the period of time under consideration; and what assumptions and experiences coloured those views and attitudes.

These views will be contrasted with the image of Germans revealed in the mass medium of film. The cinema was a very popular form of entertainment during the period under consideration and therefore provides a good contrast to the personal views revealed by the IWM papers. I will focus on feature films which deal with Germans, which inevitably means a concentration on war films, but also on films dealing, directly or indirectly, with issues arising from the war, such as *Frieda* (Basil Dearden, 1947). While comedy films were very popular during the war years, I have avoided discussion of these: such films tend to rely heavily on German stereotypes and for their plots on German stupidity, and cannot be seen as portraying the Germans in a manner which is intended to be taken seriously. I have included one US film, released in the UK as



*Rommel – Desert Fox* (Henry Hathaway, 1951). While not a British film, it was based on a best-selling biography of the German Field Marshal written by a British officer<sup>5</sup> and reflects well the views expressed there. I have also included one documentary, *Desert Victory* (Roy Boulting, David Macdonald, 1943) because it was released as a main feature. *The Lion Has Wings* (Michael Powell, Brian Desmond Hurst, Adrian Brunel, 1939) is a mixture of documentary and fiction. There is a detailed analysis of the way in which Germans are portrayed in the films under discussion. This mainly concentrates on characterisation, themes, dialogue and storyline rather than visual imagery; it is generally accepted that British cinema has a literary rather than a visual focus. Visual imagery is considered in those cases where it is particularly evident. I will also look at the reception of these films through the medium of published reviews.

Again, much has been written about British wartime cinema; however, as I will demonstrate, such literature has focussed on depictions of Britishness or deals with the films from a particular perspective (gender or class); the depiction of the Germans has been considered from the point of view of its propaganda aspect rather than a detailed examination of exactly how the Germans are portrayed<sup>6</sup>.

Soldiers were exposed to the images of the enemy revealed by feature films in the same way as the civilian population. In the post-war period, the soldier was part of the audience for war and war-related films. He could see mirrored in fiction his wartime experiences, and also how such experiences were reinterpreted by film-makers. This is particularly clearly seen in the case of the prisoner-of-war film, which began with the fairly 'true-to-life' *The Captive Heart* (Dearden, 1947), moved to the rather less

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<sup>5</sup> Desmond Young, *Rommel*, London, Collins, 1950.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Balfour, *Propaganda in War 1939-1945: Organisations, Policies and Publics in Britain and Germany*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, and Jo Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany: World War II Cinema*, Oxford, Berg, 2007.

`realistic' but still factual *The Wooden Horse* (Jack Lee, 1950): and culminated in *The Colditz Story* (Guy Hamilton, 1954), a film based on a `true story' by Pat Reid but heavily influenced by the conventions of the prisoner-of-war genre established prior to the Second World War as my discussion of the film will demonstrate.

This thesis concentrates on detailed analysis of the texts chosen, analysis conducted on an empirical basis. It begins with an examination of literature relating to British attitudes to the Germans, elucidating the commonly accepted stereotype which has prevailed, with minor variations, from before the First World War. The literature also reveals how such a stereotype formed an important element in official propaganda during the Second World War. The discussion then proceeds to a detailed look at the views expressed or to be deduced from various IWM papers, and finally to an analysis of how Germans are presented in British films. The film section is divided into three chapters: films from 1930 until the outbreak of war; films from the wartime years; and films from the post-war period. While the discussion is focussed on films made during the period in question, I have digressed to look at films outside the period when this is particularly relevant to provide contrast.



## CHAPTER 1 – THE STEREOTYPE AND PUBLIC OPINION

There is a long-established stereotype of the Germans which pre-dates the First World War and was well summarised during a meeting between Mrs. Thatcher and her advisers concerning German reunification and reported in the *Independent on Sunday* on 15 July 1990. Germans were seen as over-sensitive, self-obsessed, inclined to self-pity and longing to be liked. Additional characteristics perceived were: 'angst, aggressiveness, assertiveness, bullying, egotism, inferiority complex, sentimentality'<sup>7</sup>. Other aspects of the stereotype were, 'alien, ruthless, arrogant...shifty, vicious, not to be trusted'<sup>8</sup>; pagans and barbarians<sup>9</sup>; all this, as John Ramsden suggests, bound with notions of 'the hideous militarism of the Prussians'<sup>10</sup>; an association with sexual perversion<sup>11</sup>; and a lack of a sense of humour<sup>12</sup>. Media manipulation makes stereotyping more powerful<sup>13</sup>, and such stereotyping amounts to racism<sup>14</sup>. Emig suggests that 'what represents the bogey-man in the Other generally displays close affinities with what a culture perceives as negative and threatening in itself'<sup>15</sup>, which echoes the *New Statesman* point that most of the qualities mentioned at the Thatcher meeting 'were attributed to Thatcher herself even by admirers'<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Margaret Kertesz, p.1. The same meeting was invoked by Susan Price, 'A view from a bridge: stereotypes of the German in business and higher education', in Rainer Emig, ed, *Stereotypes in Contemporary Anglo-German Relations*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000, pp.155-162, p.160, and by John Ramsden, *Don't Mention the War: The British and the Germans since 1890*, London, Little Brown, 2006, p.406.

<sup>8</sup> John A. Morris, 'Stereotypes, language and the media: *plus ça change*' in Emig, pp.47-57, pp.52 and 53. Ramsden refers to a growing belief in German duplicity in the period prior to the First World War, Ramsden, p.79.

<sup>9</sup> Ramsden, p.103.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted Ramsden, p.101.

<sup>11</sup> Ramsden, p.125.

<sup>12</sup> Morris, p.49.

<sup>13</sup> Morris, p.50.

<sup>14</sup> Ramsden, p.124. See also Katy Greenland, 'Can't live with them, can't live without them: stereotypes in international relations', in Emig, pp.15-30, p. 16 and 19.

<sup>15</sup> Rainer Emig, 'Introduction', in Emig, pp.1-12, p.8.

<sup>16</sup> Ramsden, p.406. David Edgerton, *Warfare State: Britain, 1920-1970*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, argues that the British state was rather more warlike and militaristic than is generally acknowledged.

Ramsden traces changing British attitudes to Germans from a favourable view in the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century to growing anti-German feeling from the time of the Franco-Prussian war and German unification. It was the Great War, however, that ‘unleashed hatred that conditioned attitudes for the rest of the century’<sup>17</sup>: Germany was blamed for starting the war; her behaviour in the occupied territories evoking imagery of ‘the Hun’<sup>18</sup>. Ramsden argues that attitudes in this period were based on a set of oppositions: ‘British gifted amateurism...contrasted with “Teutonic deadly concentration of mind”’; sportsmanship against science; self-government as opposed to discipline; ‘a “highly emotional and excitable” people, “organised and regimented like an ant-hill or beehive”, compared to the sensible, independent British’<sup>19</sup>.

The flowering in Germany of all the arts, but especially film and architecture, in the 1920s softened the militaristic image of the Germans<sup>20</sup>. British awareness of the harshness of the Versailles Treaty even ameliorated the response to the rise of the Nazis<sup>21</sup>. ‘British observers, over-anxious about communism, tended to understate that threat to democracy from the Right...’<sup>22</sup>; they also failed to understand the racist, expansionist ideology of Nazism<sup>23</sup>. The existence of the Nazi Party revived the concept of ‘good’ (anti-Nazi) Germans and the bad Nazi<sup>24</sup>. German refugees who fled to Britain were clearly anti-Nazi, civilised people; the idea that all Germans were ‘ancestrally guilty could never pass unchallenged’<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Ramsden, p.58.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.154.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.143.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.159. Margaret Kertesz suggests that ‘British political theory had no tools with which to make the Nazi phenomenon comprehensible, with the result that it was difficult to take Nazi ideology and discourse seriously’, Kertesz, p.39.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.171.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.174.



The Second World War caused a revival of the older stereotype. While at the beginning of the war, Chamberlain could claim that Britain was not fighting 'you, the German people, for whom we have no bitter feelings, but against a tyrannous and forsworn regime which has betrayed not only its own people...but all that you and we hold dear'<sup>26</sup>, this discrimination did not last. As Ramsden points out, the 'second conflict – to British thinking, unequivocally the fault of Germany – raised the tricky question of whether the Germans were naturally bad or just badly led...Were the Nazis an aberration from German history or its natural outcome, albeit in extreme form?'<sup>27</sup>.

Sir Robert Vansittart was in no doubt; his *Black Record* was a popular best-seller after having been a series of broadcasts presumably appealing particularly to those who agreed with the author's sentiments<sup>28</sup>. Vansittart reflects the stereotype: Germans are warmongers<sup>29</sup> and aggressively expansionist<sup>30</sup>; such militarism is associated with Prussianism<sup>31</sup>; there is perfidy in foreign affairs<sup>32</sup> and forgery is 'endemic in Germany'<sup>33</sup>; German psychology consists of 'Envy, Self-Pity and Cruelty'<sup>34</sup>. Nazis are 'gangsters' with Hitler capitalising on 'the German strain of ill-defined mysticism'<sup>35</sup>, and are anti-Christian which affects the whole German people<sup>36</sup>. Germans include 'a large supply of cold-blooded young barbarians'<sup>37</sup> and are 'torturers'<sup>38</sup>, 'hide-bound, dreary robots'<sup>39</sup>, always ready to obey 'any order, however

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<sup>26</sup> Anthony Osley, *Persuading the People*, London, HMSO, 1995, p.19.

<sup>27</sup> Ramsden, p.180.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp.184-185.

<sup>29</sup> Sir Robert Vansittart, *Black Record: Germans Past and Present*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1941, p.viii.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp.10-11.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.50.



cruel<sup>40</sup> and who lack a sense of humour<sup>41</sup>. This is a male stereotype, but women are equally culpable, happy to be relegated to *Kinder, Kirche und Küche*. While not beyond redemption, any change 'will at the very best be extremely difficult'<sup>42</sup>. He acknowledges the existence of many Germans who are opposed to the direction their country has taken but 'unfortunately they are never there on The Day...'<sup>43</sup>.

This powerful anti-German stereotype is reflected by the respected academic historian, A.J.P. Taylor who, in 1944, wrote a book tracing *The Course of German History*. For Taylor, the whole German people were responsible for the Third Reich: 'It was a system founded on terror, unworkable without the secret police and the concentration camp; but...it was the only system of German government ever created by popular initiative'<sup>44</sup>. Unlike Vansittart, Taylor did not accept any possibility of redemption for the German people, or any likelihood that they could achieve a popularly supported, functioning, liberal democracy. For him, the enforced postwar division of Germany between the Communist East and the capitalist West was a fortunate occurrence, since it muzzled German power.

As Ramsden notes, there was opposition to Vansittartism both from the Left, who regarded Hitler as a tool of Big Business, for whose policies Socialism was the answer<sup>45</sup> and from some in the Christian churches. However, the Labour Party was strongly antagonistic to the Germans<sup>46</sup>, and opposition from the churches was

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.4. Ramsden notes that German opposition was dismissed by some because it had failed to bring down Hitler, Ramsden, p.190.

<sup>44</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A survey of the development of German history since 1815*, London, Routledge, 2001, p.253.

<sup>45</sup> Ramsden, pp.188-190.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp.194-195.

fragmented<sup>47</sup>. All critics argued that to brand all Germans culpable, as Vansittart did, 'reduced the chances of "good" Germans rising up against the Nazis'<sup>48</sup>. There was (and indeed still is) little acknowledgement of German resistance in British popular culture; in the early days of the war, a few films featured German opposition to Hitler but after 1941, only Powell and Pressburger's *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1942) showed resistance<sup>49</sup>, and in that film resistance is marginalized in the person of the elderly Theo, whose sons are Nazis.

As the war went on, attitudes hardened; while British propaganda rarely attempted 'hate' campaigns, the tenor of Churchill's language was that hatred of the Germans was legitimate<sup>50</sup>, and this underlying hatred was ratcheted up by the discovery of the concentration camps in 1945<sup>51</sup>. Ramsden summarises the position at the end of the war as '...there was every intention in the British mind of being "beastly to the Germans" for years to come'<sup>52</sup>.

There were, however, a number of factors which predisposed the British to become sympathetic to the Germans. Churchill himself favoured 'a magnanimous policy towards Germany'<sup>53</sup>. There was an awareness in 1945 of German suffering, for example the expulsion of Germans from Poland, events of which modern Britons are

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp.196-198.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.201. Meehan, p.92, states that 'the British Government had no intention of letting the existence of an opposition inside Germany be known'. Charles Wheeler, 'Foreword', to *Germany 1944: The British Soldier's Pocketbook*, Richmond, The National Archives, 2006, pp.v-vi comments that 'we soon found that that there had been more active wartime resistance to Hitler than the British establishment was willing to acknowledge, just possibly because to concede this would have clashed with the doctrine...that the Germans were innately war-loving, psychologically crippled and born to be bad' (of his service in Germany at the end of the war).

<sup>50</sup> Ramsden, p.204.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.207.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.210.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.212.



mostly unaware<sup>54</sup>. In Britain, German prisoners of war were retained for some years after the war to work in agriculture, and this generated sympathy for their plight and a desire to see them repatriated. Ramsden points out that 'Luftwaffe personnel, paratroops and submariners, all groups dominated by Nazi ideology' were not used as labour<sup>55</sup>; the fact that those who might be thought most deserving of such a punishment were exempted may have helped to stimulate sympathy for those less dangerous who were thus exploited.

The Potsdam conference of 1945 settled on a policy of 'denazification, decentralisation, demilitarisation and democratisation'<sup>56</sup> towards defeated Germany. This rejected the extreme measures advocated by Morgenthau<sup>57</sup>. There was a desire to build Germany up economically to keep her out of Russia's hands<sup>58</sup> - the wartime alliance between the USSR and the western Allies quickly broke down once the common enemy was defeated. Denazification ended fairly quickly, and there was a reluctance to push war crimes trials too far. While this may have been a sensible policy to pursue at the time, it left the impression that there were Nazis still at large, and this view would 'underpin British views of Germany for decades'<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.243-245. Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich: From the Fall of Vienna to the Berlin Airlift*, London, John Murray, 2007, gives a detailed account of the German experience in the post-war period, and Jörg Friedrich (translated by Allison Brown), *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany 1940-1945*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, is a vivid but controversial account of the British bombing of Germany and the suffering it caused.

<sup>55</sup> Ramsden, p.216.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.217.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.218.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.224. For a full description of the problems and failures of denazification, see Perry Biddiscombe, *The Denazification of Germany: A History, 1945-1950*, Stroud, Tempus Publishing, 2007. William Friedmann, *The Allied Military Government of Germany*, London, Stevens & Sons, 1947, pp.110-125, suggests that the particular form of denazification adopted by the British and Americans was probably unworkable and was certainly counter-productive; he also notes that there were two alternatives: 'the swift and radical elimination and prosecution of the upper hierarchy of Nazi leaders, including the leaders of industry while leaving the rest of the population in peace and the method actually adopted of combing the entire population. The majority of those who had had practical experience in military government probable feel to-day that the former alternative would have been the better one', p.121.

Ramsden also discusses unacceptable British behaviour among the occupying forces<sup>60</sup>. This account mirrors that of Patricia Meehan whose book, *A Strange Enemy People: Germans under the British 1945-1950*, contains a detailed critique of British occupation attitudes. She notes the detention of the young in British internment camps<sup>61</sup>; the mistreatment of internees<sup>62</sup>; 'fiddles' by British occupiers<sup>63</sup>; the colonial nature of some aspects of British rule<sup>64</sup>; the way in which accompanying British families, when they were allowed out to Germany, lived a separate existence from the Germans<sup>65</sup>. The work of the Education Branch was, however, a great success<sup>66</sup>. In 1947, with 'the perception of the Soviet Union as a threat to the West, it became important to have the Germans "on our Side"'. The result was the 'be-kind-to-the-Germans' order, encouraging social interaction between British and Germans<sup>67</sup>. As Meehan goes on to record, this was easier said than done<sup>68</sup>.

At home, attitudes were changing. Between December 1946 and May 1949 (a period during which strict rationing was still in force in a Britain technically at war with Germany, the announcement of the termination of the state of war not being made until 9 July 1951<sup>69</sup>), British people sent food parcels to hungry Germans<sup>70</sup>. By early 1947, 'ministers realised a more generous policy had become politically acceptable'<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Ramsden, pp.240-241.

<sup>61</sup> Patricia Meehan, p.71.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp.70-71.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 116-132.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., pp.60-61. The same point is made by William Friedmann; he refers to a type of 'British administrator [who] suffers from the colonial mind...[which] may be more of a handicap than of a benefit in the administration of a highly developed and civilised country', Friedmann, p.46.

<sup>65</sup> Meehan, pp.149-150.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp.159-183.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.152-157.

<sup>69</sup> Meehan, p.268.

<sup>70</sup> Ramsden, p.244. A good example is 'The Mayor's Winter Collection for German Children' set up by the Mayor of Reading, Phoebe Cusden, in November 1946, see Margaret Brown, 'Towns that Build Bridges' in *History Today*, Vol.48, No. 8, August 1998, pp.3-6, and the *Reading Mercury*, letter to the editor from Phoebe Cusden, 30 November 1946, discussed in the editions of 7 December 1946 and 14 December 1946.

<sup>71</sup> Ramsden, p.245.



Events such as the Berlin blockade and the subsequent airlift encouraged such a shift, as did the personal contacts between Britain and what was to become the Federal Republic<sup>72</sup>. On a more popular level, incidents such as the courage of Bert Trautmann, the goalie who continued to play with a broken neck<sup>73</sup>, and the excellent treatment of the victims of the Munich air crash in German hospitals<sup>74</sup> provided good publicity for Germany. However, the British press remained hostile<sup>75</sup>. The British could still maintain their self-image of effortless superiority, as over British input to the German constitution: 'There was arrogance here, the belief that Britons understood democratic elections and Germans did not'; but by 1970, Germany could be seen as a mature democracy<sup>76</sup>.

Ramsden's thesis can be summarised thus: popular and elite opinions alternate between favourable and unfavourable, even xenophobic, attitudes towards Germany, and have tended to do so since the formation of the unified German state in 1871. Germany has been regarded unfavourably both at times of war, when such an antipathetic attitude is to be expected, and during those times of peace when Germany has been perceived as a rival, such as the period immediately before the First World War when Germany challenged Britain's position both in the economic sphere and on the high seas, and during the 1960s and 1970s when Germany was economically dominant within the EEC. A stereotype has been developed of the Germans, confirmed

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.245 and pp.246-247.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., pp.325-362.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp.341-343.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Meehan records Sir Frank Roberts' complaint concerning 'carping' by the British Press about the Germans, this not changing until the Queen's visit to Germany in 1965, Meehan, p.270. Donald Watt in 1964 concluded that thus far, below the elite level, 'lacking any positive leadership, British opinion has remained fixed in the stereotypes established in two world wars', quoted in Ramsden, p.293. Ramsden notes that matters improved after the Queen's visit; the popular dailies became less anti-German and on the more elite level there was the experience of co-operation within the EEC, Ramsden, pp.292-293.

<sup>76</sup> Ramsden, p.256. William Friedmann notes the British imposition upon the Germans of the British model of local government, one which was contrary to accepted German practice and was bitterly opposed; this was the opposite of the Americans and the French who 'did not interfere with the established system...', Friedmann, pp.102-104.



by the experience of fighting two world wars against Germany. Popular cultural items, such as novels, films and television dramas have tended to confirm the stereotype, particularly over the last twenty-five years; even newspapers in their football coverage use language steeped in Second World War imagery<sup>77</sup>; thus language describing Germany and its people has become rooted in iconic images dating from 1939-1945. This tendency has been exacerbated by the way in which German history is taught in British schools<sup>78</sup>. Significantly the Occupation period, when many young British men and some British women met, lived amongst and even befriended Germans, is almost totally ignored in British culture.

Margaret Kertesz explored British perception of the Germans for the narrower period of the Second World War, basing her findings on a survey of newspaper reporting and also on Mass-Observation diaries. These diarists were a self-selected group, not necessarily reflecting the views of the wider public. M-O was aware of the bias of the sample, admitting that it was 'weighted towards middle-class and in intelligence. This group tends on the whole (according to other surveys) to be more racial minded than average'<sup>79</sup>. The advantage of analysing the opinions of this group was thought to be that the views expressed would be 'more candid ...than in interview work. On this point answers are conditioned by "respectability" at the level of public opinion whereas private opinion is considerably more fluid and varied'<sup>80</sup>. Kertesz concentrated on six key points during the war: its outbreak; Dunkirk; German invasion of the USSR; El Alamein; D Day; and VE Day.

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<sup>77</sup> Ramsden, pp.399-402. See also, Joe Brooker, 'Stereotypes and national identity in Euro 96' in Emig, pp. 79-94.

<sup>78</sup> Ramsden, pp.392-398.

<sup>79</sup> Mass-Observation archive, FR 1104, 'Report on Private Opinion about the German People', 27 February, 1942, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Her findings agree with Ramsden's. The enemy was redefined 'from the Nazi elite to a wider hostility which, for some...embraced the entire German population. The German role of enemy was established by the development of an imagery of the "other", which placed the enemy outside the realm of Christianity, of culture, even of humanity'. A concept of a British character evolved, with the German as its opposite<sup>81</sup>. Mass-Observers became more hostile as the war went on 'for public imagery was both pervasive and powerful'. However some observers 'held on to the idea of the fellow humanity of an enemy nation'<sup>82</sup>.

Kertesz gives details of the stereotype: the enemy were the opponents of Christianity, 'devilish or evil or pagan'; '... outside civilisation – barbaric – or worse still, deemed to be outside humanity, bestial'. They could be 'depicted as abnormal through the languages of criminal delinquency or illness or disease, both physical and mental'<sup>83</sup>. While initially a distinction between Germans and Nazis was discerned, this became blurred later: there was, apparently, no overt resistance to the Hitler regime in Germany; 'ordinary Germans' took part in atrocities<sup>84</sup>. Other aspects were:

Germans were stolid and dull, attracted to the pomp of uniforms and military-type discipline. They were sentimental, but also had a cruel streak. They allowed themselves too easily to be led – their herd-like instincts were remarked upon by one in five respondents. Nevertheless, they were industrious and efficient, but had no sense of humour<sup>85</sup>.

They could be seen as childish or childlike<sup>86</sup>. 'Nazi ideology nourished sentimental, superstitious fanatics'<sup>87</sup>, and had a reputation for lying and treachery<sup>88</sup>. There was the

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<sup>81</sup> Kertesz, summary.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.24; see also p.141.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.44.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

problem of German youth, corrupted by Nazi ideals but 'not held responsible for the war or the atrocities committed during it'; what to do with them after an Allied victory?<sup>89</sup> German fighting quality could be admired, 'but it was a vice when contrasted with the alleged unwarlike British nature'<sup>90</sup>. As Kertesz points out, this is a very masculine stereotype; however it is difficult from the diaries to ascertain whether their writers' attitudes to German women varied from that regarding the population as a whole<sup>91</sup>. These attitudes pre-dated the Second World War<sup>92</sup>. At different stages of the war, different aspects of the stereotype could be emphasised<sup>93</sup>.

Regarding press coverage, Kertesz looks back to the interwar period, seeing the Conservative press as maintaining a 'hands off' attitude to the Nazi government, with the Liberal and Labour press more critical but still isolationist<sup>94</sup>. Newspaper coverage of the war reflected 'the accepted and establishment views' and was generally hostile<sup>95</sup>. Initially the ordinary Germans, denied 'access to information and the right of free discussion or even of free thought', were thought not to have a choice about fighting<sup>96</sup>. Hostility hardened as the war progressed. On VE day the press had a field day with reporting victory, 'contrasting the rhetoric about the master race with the fact of defeat'<sup>97</sup>. There was a need for the image of a hated enemy in wartime<sup>98</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.142.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>93</sup> See, eg. *ibid.*, p.202 and p.207.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., summary.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p.49.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.179.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p.2.



The diarists' views were more mixed. On the outbreak of war, they varied from sympathy to extreme hostility<sup>99</sup>: '...there was almost universal agreement among the diarists that the German people themselves were not the enemy, victims as they were of Nazi oppression'<sup>100</sup>. However, 'the idea of Germany as the eternal enemy was already in the air, and it gained currency as the war proceeded'<sup>101</sup>. After Dunkirk, the diary evidence was confused, with many more bitter about France's 'desertion' than they were about the Germans<sup>102</sup>. However, fear and the blitz experience led to people becoming less tolerant<sup>103</sup>, with feelings 'focussed on the issues of revenge, reprisal and punishment'<sup>104</sup>. With the invasion of Russia, again feelings were confused: some considered that differences with Russia should be put aside to defeat the common foe while others found their distrust difficult to relinquish<sup>105</sup>. Many felt happy to let the Russians do 'the dirty work', such as bombing civilians, which the British self-image made it difficult for British people to support as their own government's policy<sup>106</sup>.

By D Day, the unconditional surrender demand was seen by press and Mass-Observers as a sign of British moral superiority: 'Germany had to be depicted as totally in the wrong to justify the war at all'<sup>107</sup>. People were beginning to show signs of 'vindictiveness...in response to questions on how to treat the German people after the war...'. Bombing was approved of by more than half the population, despite Bishop Bell's opposition<sup>108</sup>. However, most people thought that British bombing was accurate, and this was how it was reported; it was assumed that most targets were military<sup>109</sup>.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., pp.59-60.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.63.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.79.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p.96.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p.97.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p.112.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p.117.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.149.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p.152.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p.153.

Some diaries revealed respect for the ability of the German soldier, although this was tempered by 'the Nazi reputation for lying and treachery'<sup>110</sup>, but others showed great hostility<sup>111</sup>, the V weapons helping 'to cause a general hardening of opinion against the Germans'<sup>112</sup>. 'The ordinary people were depicted as victims rather than enemies when they were mentioned at all'<sup>113</sup>.

One aspect of opinion at the end of the war was the diminishing friendliness towards the USSR by the beginning of May 1945<sup>114</sup>, while the liberation of Bergen-Belsen and Buchenwald led to the loss of any sympathy for the Germans<sup>115</sup>.

Most Mass-Observers felt a particular degree of hostility towards the German leaders and war criminals which they did not always direct towards the German people generally. Nevertheless there was a great deal of bitterness against the Germans at the end of the war, although Mass-Observers tended to report its expression in other people rather than claim it as their own opinion<sup>116</sup>.

Kertesz discusses three directives M-O produced in November 1942, November 1944 and November 1945. Of the 1942 directive she points out that

...only a minority specifically mentioned stories of the plight of the Jews, or of atrocities being committed by the German army, but many of those who did found that their horror soured their opinion of the German people. Despite the scepticism of some as to the accuracy of these reports, they were clearly a decisive factor in the general hardening of opinion.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p.161.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.177.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p.178.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp.193-194.



Many blamed the Germans for the rise of Nazism<sup>117</sup>, although:

...many attributed this to gullibility and stupidity on the part of the people rather than to their support of Nazi doctrine. The Germans were very often stigmatised as being too subservient to authority...The perception that German thought was emotionally based rather than rational was at the root of many of the patronising attitudes expressed by Mass-Observers. Rationality was an integral part of being civilised and both were central to the British self-image<sup>118</sup>.

She notes the problem of distinction between Nazi Germans and non-Nazi Germans due to the lack of resistance and unrest<sup>119</sup>. Most Observers agreed that some control of Germany would be required after the war to prevent another one, and assumed 'that Britain had a right to take the international role of judge, police and teacher with regard to another nation'<sup>120</sup>.

In 1944, the directive replies indicated that dislike and distrust were more widely felt and more openly expressed than in 1942 as a result of the combined influence of the V weapons, reports of Nazi concentration camps and the persecution of the Jews. Despite this, 'violently vindictive attitudes had not increased. The Germans were still condemned for not thinking for themselves...and for following their leaders too uncritically...'<sup>121</sup>. There was also a more uncompromising attitude to the post-war treatment of Germany: prevention of another war and of further atrocities was given the highest priority<sup>122</sup>. There was both despair of finding any 'good' Germans but also 'some recognition of the Germans as victims of war'<sup>123</sup>.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.134.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p.137.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp.24, 141.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p.148.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., p.174.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., pp.175-176.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p.176.

The November 1945 directive asked for people's personal opinions about the Germans. Many aspects of the stereotype survived<sup>124</sup>. Hostility had diminished since the end of the war, there was an increasing amount of pity but still much distrust<sup>125</sup>. A distinction was drawn between the individual German, for whom one could feel pity, and the people as a mass<sup>126</sup>. 'Some Mass-Observers felt friendship rather than mere pity for the Germans, challenging the dominant feelings of combined pity and mistrust'<sup>127</sup>. Kertesz suggests that the Nuremberg trials may have helped to pin the blame on certain individuals, 'making it easier to acquit the others'<sup>128</sup>, and that 'personal experience had a great deal to do with people's ability to redefine their relationship with the Germans'<sup>129</sup>.

In her conclusion, Kertesz argues that despite 'all the efforts of the press to depict the people as one', that was not, according to the evidence of the Mass-Observation archive, how individuals responded<sup>130</sup>, a small minority continued to maintain friendly views of Germans even at times when these views were being seriously challenged. There was a stereotype of the 'young Nazi soldier', and a large majority accused the Germans of collective guilt<sup>131</sup>. Men tried to be fair. Women were more openly vengeful, but they also responded to the image of Germany as victim. Few were in favour of retribution after the war, and they were more concerned about suffering; they tried 'to understand how the Germans could have got involved in such an evil situation'<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p.201.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p.207.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp.209-210.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p.211.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p.213.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., pp.216-217.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., p.218-219.

In February 1948, Mass-Observation produced a report entitled 'Attitudes to the German People'<sup>133</sup>. The report opened by noting that those in blitzed cities did not demand reprisals for German bombing<sup>134</sup>, and this was reflected in further polls<sup>135</sup>. A poll among Mass-Observation's National Panel of Observers in 1942 found that 54% had a favourable view of the German people. The 1948 report points out that 'although those who made a clear distinction between people and leaders were in a majority, it is clear...that they believed themselves to be in a small minority'<sup>136</sup>. Between 1940 and 1945, about one in four of the general public surveyed favoured a vindictive peace, 'but it tended to be higher when atrocities and military reverses coincided'. Some of the comments could be quite extreme suggesting that all Germans should be killed<sup>137</sup>, although whether such suggestions were ever intended or expected to be taken up as policy is debatable. The Report notes that 'the revelations of Belsen' was 'one of the biggest stimulants to anti-German feeling'<sup>138</sup>.

By the end of the war people were clearly out of sympathy with the foe, but by the summer of 1947, 'the antagonistic group had declined to about one in four. Nearly half expressed sympathy or "no ill-feeling"; examples of a shift in view are that 'rather more of a London sample approved than disapproved the lifting of a ban on marriages between German POWs and English girls', and three quarters believed that German POWs in Britain should be repatriated<sup>139</sup>. However, even in 1948 the attitudes of a substantial minority remained unchanged<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>133</sup> Mass-Observation archive, FR2565, 'Attitudes to the German People', 23 February 1948.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p.3.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p.4.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.8.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p.9.



British views of the Germans were very much bound up with the British self-image, against which the Germans were seen as 'the Other'<sup>141</sup>. There was a well-recognised stereotype which has proved remarkably resilient and has been fairly consistently held by British people throughout the Twentieth and into the Twenty-First century, as John Ramsden's study indicates. Margaret Kertesz's thesis indicates that individuals can take a more nuanced view than the public promulgation of the stereotype would suggest. M-O reports indicate that individuals can be very reluctant to voice what they see as heretical, unpatriotic views in public. This, combined with a relentless barrage of opinion put forward in the press contradictory to their own, leads individuals to assume that they are in a minority. It is clear that the stereotype was particularly prevalent during the Second World War, and was articulated in newspaper coverage of the period. It was also a view accepted by many members of the Establishment, as Vansittart shows, and by members of the intelligentsia, for example Taylor. Kertesz's thesis dealt primarily with civilian views, although some Mass-Observers were in the Services. There is little in the Mass-Observation archive relating to the subject after 1945 apart from the 1948 Report cited above.

While Ramsden asserts that there was no 'hate' campaign against the Germans, there is evidence that official attempts were made to stir up anger. Both Ian McLaine and Jo Fox refer to an 'Anger' campaign<sup>142</sup>. Michael Balfour is more dismissive of the idea in his survey of British propaganda, noting that it 'was the transient idea of a group of people groping for the right thing to do'<sup>143</sup>. McLaine describes the genesis of the campaign after Dunkirk, its being a response to the perception that the British public were 'patient, long-suffering, slow to anger, slower still to hate', and were believed to

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<sup>141</sup> Kertesz, p.220.

<sup>142</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1979, pp.143-147, and Fox, pp.137-144..

<sup>143</sup> Balfour, p.188.



be 'harbouring little sense of real personal animus against the average German man or woman, accepting with amazing phlegm bitter reverses without overmuch recrimination'<sup>144</sup>. The Ministry of Information considered that there was a need to engender 'personal anger...against the German people and Germany'<sup>145</sup>. McLaine questions the assumptions behind such a proposal, noting the opinion of 'contemporary psychiatrists and social psychologists (whom, for the most part, the Ministry studiously avoided consulting) that hate is a poor basis for morale'<sup>146</sup>. He then proceeds to set out the plan drawn up by the Ministry 'for a massive and, at first clandestine, campaign'<sup>147</sup>. A distinction was to be made between an 'emotional appeal' to the 'broad mass', focussing on German history, tracing connections between the Great War and the current conflict, references to Huns, Germans being bullies, an inferiority complex being 'the root of German aggression'. '“The sophisticated and educated classes”' were to be given "more restrained and factual" evidence, directed at the fundamental "rotteness" of the German character', again the Germans as bullies, but also refuting attacks on the Versailles Treaty and emphasising Hitler's desire for world domination<sup>148</sup>. McLaine acknowledges that the campaign 'was not implemented on the heroic scale originally contemplated [but] its principal themes were embodied in the Ministry's public attitude towards the enemy for the rest of the war'; the problem with 'a reversion to the crudest type of First World War propaganda' was that people were sceptical about such information<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>144</sup> McLaine, p.143.

<sup>145</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.143-144.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.144-145.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147. See also Balfour, p.300.

Balfour points out that by 1943 propaganda was swinging to attributing blame for German crimes to 'the whole German people'<sup>150</sup>. Jo Fox notes Kenneth Clark's objections to such an approach which he considered "'disastrous from the point of view of propaganda". Looking to the future he questioned "if the Germans are really [incorrigible], what can be the outcome of the war? Are we hoping to exterminate 80 million people or to keep them in continual subjugation?"<sup>151</sup>. Fox goes on to confirm Margaret Kertesz's view that 'the public did not *consistently* take an overtly negative view of the Germans ... drawing a clear distinction between the German people and their Nazi leadership'<sup>152</sup>. However, as my previous discussion indicates, by the end of the war most British people had adopted a belief in collective guilt.

There is a considerable literature concerning British films and the Second World War, whether dealing with films made during the war, or subsequent films about the war. However this does not focus on the way the Germans were portrayed<sup>153</sup>. There is a concentration on the characterisation of the British<sup>154</sup>; the interaction between the Services and the filmmakers<sup>155</sup>; the background to the making of the films<sup>156</sup>. Robert Murphy produced an overview of films concerning the Second World War which does not concentrate on depictions of Germans although this subject inevitable arises in relation to some films, for example *Frieda*<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>150</sup> Balfour, p.302.

<sup>151</sup> Fox, p.138.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.139.

<sup>153</sup> Jo Fox gives some analysis in her study, which is mainly concerned with contrasting British and German film propaganda. James Chapman includes brief analyses in *The British at War: Cinema, State and Propaganda 1939-1945*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1998.

<sup>154</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Films and British National Identity: From Dickens to Dad's Army*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1997.

<sup>155</sup> S.P. MacKenzie, *British War Films, 1939-1945: The Cinema and the Services*, London, Hambledon, 2001.

<sup>156</sup> Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994.

<sup>157</sup> Robert Murphy, *British Cinema and the Second World War*, London, Continuum, 2000.

As regards soldiers' opinions, there has been 'little scholarly attention...paid to prisoners of war...and their histories'<sup>158</sup>. There is a good deal of popular literature on the subject, such as Pat Reid's *The Colditz Story*<sup>159</sup>, which does reveal certain attitudes towards the Germans, but nothing systematic. In relation to the occupation period, there is a focus on particular policies such as denazification<sup>160</sup> or political re-education<sup>161</sup>. Patricia Meehan deals with British policies and attitudes in their occupation zone focussing on the military government and British civilian administration<sup>162</sup>, while Giles MacDonogh looks at German suffering in the aftermath of war<sup>163</sup>. Again, the viewpoints of the ordinary soldier are peripheral.

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<sup>158</sup> Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich, 'Prisoners of War in the Second World War: An Overview' in Bob Moore and Kent Fedorowich, eds, *Prisoners of War and their Captors in World War II*, Oxford, Berg, 1996, pp.1-17. The volume goes on to consider policy relating to prisoners of war.

<sup>159</sup> P.R. Reid, *Colditz*, London, Book Club Associates, 1972.

<sup>160</sup> Biddiscombe, *The Denazification of Germany*.

<sup>161</sup> Nicholas Pronay and Keith Wilson, eds., *The Political Re-education of Germany and her Allies after World War II*, London, Croom Helm, 1985.

<sup>162</sup> Patricia Meehan, *A Strange Enemy People*.

<sup>163</sup> Giles MacDonogh, *After the Reich*.



## CHAPTER 2 - THE SERVICEMAN'S VIEW OF THE GERMANS

Ramsden mentions one group which may have been less prejudiced against the Germans during the First World War, private soldiers. 'Richard Holmes recently concluded that there was great respect for the Germans soldier and little personal animus'<sup>164</sup>. Did this lack of personal antagonism towards his opposite number on the other side apply during the Second World War, and did the serviceman distinguish between two Germans – the ordinary opponent and the Nazi?

Servicemen were exposed to the same influences as civilians: films, newspapers and magazines, the radio. Information with a strong propaganda element was directly addressed to the Armed Forces. In late 1942, the Army Council approved the provision of educational periods for personnel; initially seen as a temporary measure, the scheme was presumably considered a success as it continued throughout the war. 'The Directorate of Army Education issued a series of...booklets ... for the course'<sup>165</sup>. It would seem there was concern that 'vague talk' about 'freedom and democracy'<sup>166</sup> left the British soldier uncertain of what he was fighting for, in contrast to his German counterpart who had a firm ideology based on faith in Hitler and ideas of 'the master race'<sup>167</sup>. While admitting there were failings with the democratic system, the material went on to extol the virtues of democracy and British institutions and values<sup>168</sup>, and to discuss the British system of government and way of life, the Empire and so on.

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<sup>164</sup> Ramsden, p.105.

<sup>165</sup> Preface to *The British Way and Purpose: Consolidated Edition of B.W.P. Booklets 1-18*, prepared by The Directorate of Army Education, 1944.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., pp.13-14.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

The booklets noted that the Germans had always been bent on eastward expansion, and through this policy linked the Kaiser and the First World War<sup>169</sup> with Hitler and the present conflict<sup>170</sup>. The evils of Nazism were discussed: the corruption introduced into the civil service by 'a "new order" run by gangsters'<sup>171</sup>; the injustice of the treatment of the Jewish population<sup>172</sup>; 'the evils of ...unredeemed mass emotion'; and the rejection of religion<sup>173</sup>. Resistance to the Nazis in Germany was described as emanating from the Christian churches<sup>174</sup>; opposition from political opponents, the Socialists and Communists – among the first groups to suffer Nazi persecution – was ignored. The Germans were accused of using 'an extraordinary combination of cunning and persistence' to undermine the Versailles settlement<sup>175</sup>.

While it was admitted that Germans 'often seem to us rather likeable as individuals', their difference from the British was stressed. They were seen as: willing to obey orders which any 'self-respecting Britisher, whether soldier or civilian' would refuse; 'susceptible to mass- appeals of a highly emotional type'; failing to take responsibility for their actions, due to their never having 'been through the school of responsible self-government'<sup>176</sup>; until these faults were corrected they would fail to be 'a modern people'<sup>177</sup>.

The question of the post-war period was considered with a discussion on how to deal with war crimes. The booklets admitted that some British conduct could be questioned,

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<sup>169</sup> Later it is stated 'German policy had been the chief trouble-maker in Europe throughout the twenty-five years of the Kaiser's reign', *ibid*, p.432.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p.138.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 361.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p.367.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, p.368.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, p.374.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p.432. Germans are later described as having 'got the whole of continental Europe within [their] grip by a combination of diplomatic cunning and military power', *ibid.*, p. 434.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p.430. The point about obeying orders is reiterated later in the discussion of war criminals, *ibid.*, p.442.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p.431.



in particular the bombing of German cities, but dismissed the argument with '...rules exist and ought to be observed so far as military needs permit...we ourselves have been most scrupulous in this respect'<sup>178</sup>. Problems foreseen for the peace settlement were: the German militarist tradition; lack of strong democratic forces; Germans' 'twisted mentality' exacerbated by 'eleven years of Gestapo terrorism', deprivation, censorship and Nazi education based on 'denial of normal civilised standards'. Despite all this, there was a need for a 'democratic revolution in Germany' because the world needed 'the wealth that German industry can produce for peaceful purposes'<sup>179</sup>.

The B.W.P. pamphlets put forward a similar assessment of the German people as that promulgated by Vansittart. The Germans were depicted as inherently militaristic, aggressively expansionist and bent on world domination. Nazism was linked to the Kaiser's regime. Its attractions as a novel, dynamic creed were acknowledged. There were hints that the Germans were somewhat hysterical, easily swayed by populist views, and mentally unbalanced: this 'twisted mentality' had been further warped by the evils of Nazi rule; they were also devious. However they were a docile people, easily led into bad ways; unwilling to take responsibility for their actions, retreating into the defence of 'only obeying orders'. There seems to be a distinction between the rulers, who manifested the symptoms of violent aggression and militarism, and the ordinary populace, culpable because they were sheep-like and failed to challenge those in authority. Thus many German faults could be ascribed to a lack of democratic experience.

Unlike Vansittart, however, the B.W.P. recognised the need to rehabilitate Germany; its industrial strength was required for the economic recovery of Europe (and by

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p.442.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p.537. There is further discussion of the need for a revival of German industry on p.538.



implication of Britain). Difficult questions were not completely ignored: it was acknowledged that democracy can fail to tackle social problems<sup>180</sup>; the vexed question of Allied bombing of German cities was alluded to but dismissed as no more than strict military necessity. Blame for both World Wars was laid firmly at Germany's door. A distinction was drawn between Christian Britain and unchristian Germany (in a rather contradictory argument that explicitly stated that a totalitarian country cannot be Christian<sup>181</sup> but opposition to the Nazi dictator was located within German Christian churches<sup>182</sup>). It is the innocent, peaceful, co-operative Us and the guilty, warmongering, militaristic Them.

The government wanted this stereotyped view to influence how British soldiers treated the German people once the British Army took over its zone of occupied Germany, to judge by the instructions in *The British Soldier's Pocketbook*, a booklet of information and instructions, issued to each soldier entering Germany at the end of the Second World War<sup>183</sup>. Possibly the aim of the guide was to encourage the Serviceman to see himself as different from (and rather superior to) the Germans as a way of discouraging sympathy for and familiarity with them. It contains strong language about fraternisation: the prevalence of VD is stressed (to discourage young soldiers from becoming involved with German women?)<sup>184</sup>; soldiers are warned about attempts to seduce them with 'Nazi propaganda', especially in relation to Allied bombing<sup>185</sup>. There was clearly concern in official circles that this policy was open to question.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p.370.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p.374.

<sup>183</sup> Edward Humphries, 'Introduction', *The British Soldier's Pocketbook*; Richmond, The National Archives, 2006, p.viii.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p.40. The guide also warns the Serviceman that German girls may be tempted into prostitution – Nazis lowered the 'standards of personal honour', *ibid.*, p.31.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., pp.xi-xvi. Later this is mentioned in terms of reprisal for the damage to 'Warsaw, Rotterdam and Belgrade', *ibid.*, pp.16-17.

German people are depicted in terms of the familiar stereotype. On occasions this is laughable: physically they are 'big, fleshy, fair-haired men and women, especially in the north'<sup>186</sup>. They have some good qualities. They are 'very hard-working and thorough... obedient ...have a great love of tidiness and order... are keen on education of a formal sort, and are proud of their "culture" and their appreciation of music, art and literature'. However, their military training, in both Prussian and Nazi armies, broke their spirit and 'made [them] cringe before authority', which is why they liked Hitler. This mindset of obedience to orders enabled them to absolve themselves of responsibility, but the *Pocketbook* is firm, they 'CANNOT SLIDE OUT OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY QUITE SO EASILY'<sup>187</sup>. 'Taken as a whole, the German is brutal when he is winning, and is sorry for himself and whines for sympathy when he is beaten'<sup>188</sup>. They 'adore military show', and the British soldier needs to be 'SMART AND SOLDIERLY' because the Germans will 'think nothing of a slovenly soldier'<sup>189</sup>.

The Tommy is warned that he may meet Germans who are ashamed of being German. This is linked to a 'sense of national inferiority' (no question of there existing Germans who are genuinely remorseful for the crimes committed in their name), which is in turn linked to Hitler's development of the concept of the Master Race<sup>190</sup>. Indeed, the soldier is warned to beware of pretend anti-Nazis; one reason for the non-fraternisation order is the need to keep him away from such influences. Fanatical Nazis may talk well, but Nazism must be judged by its deeds<sup>191</sup>. Germans are both brutal and sentimental. 'This mixture of sentimentality and callousness does not show a well-balanced mind. The Germans are not good at controlling their feelings. They have a streak of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p.18.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, pp.18-19.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., p.24.



hysteria'<sup>192</sup>. Hitler encouraged brutality. Ordinary people were encouraged to spy upon one another, 'lying and hypocrisy became a necessity'. Children were brainwashed in school to believe that 'might is right, war the finest form of human activity and Christianity just slushy sentiment'<sup>193</sup>. 'The Christian virtues of kindness and justice are thought to be unworthy of the Master Race', and Hitler's hatred of the Jews is emphasised<sup>194</sup>. Under the Nazi influence, the German national character worsened a good deal<sup>195</sup> (although the *Pocketbook* admits not all Germans are bad) and Germans are 'a STRANGE PEOPLE IN A STRANGE ENEMY COUNTRY'<sup>196</sup>. The *Pocketbook* ends with a series of DON'Ts, warning the serviceman against sympathy for the Germans: they have brought their fate upon themselves and their suffering is less than that of the occupied countries; their ideas are based on 'lying propaganda'; resemblances between Germans and British are 'surface'. Finally the serviceman is warned not to believe 'tales against our Allies or the Dominions'<sup>197</sup>.

There are clear traces of official concerns here: that soldiers will be aroused to an excessive degree of sympathy by the sight of the destruction caused to Germany, hence the constant reminders of the destruction the Germans have inflicted on others; that there might be doubts about the Allied attribution of the blame for the war; that soldiers might believe stories about the conduct of some of the allies – no doubt concerns about the possible behaviour of some of the Red Army were responsible for this admonition; there seems to be worry that Nazi ideas might appeal to some sections of the British Army; and finally, there is real concern that soldiers will relate to the Germans as to anyone else, and forget that these are 'a strange, enemy people'. The stereotype is

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., p.21.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp.22-23.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.15.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p.22.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p.41.



obviously the basis for official attitudes about how the Germans should be treated; while some differentiation is allowed for (some Germans may be genuinely anti-Nazi), this is underemphasised<sup>198</sup>.

It is worth emphasising that the *Pocketbook* was an official publication, issued to each Serviceman and woman who went into Germany, either during the fighting or later as part of the occupation force. It articulates the same rhetoric about Germans as that of Vansittart<sup>199</sup>. Germany's history was unique in Europe, and had led to her people becoming uniquely brutalised by government policies and by their militaristic culture. At a high level in British society in 1945 there appears to have been a conviction of the inherent difference in character between the British (and their allies) and the Germans. While the 'man in the street' might also hate the Germans, his attitude seems to have been based more on an instinctive disgust at aspects of German behaviour, particularly the persecution and murder of the Jews and other concentration camp inmates, and to be less 'racially' based than that of their 'betters'.

The opinions of the men fighting the Germans were as varied as those of the civilian, in circumstances where a greater degree of hostility might have been expected – the fighting man was in a direct 'kill or be killed' situation in relation to the enemy.

Examination of material in the Imperial War Museum archive shows a variety of attitudes to the Germans, some reflecting an unthinking acceptance of the German

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<sup>198</sup> Friedmann states that Allied occupation policy was based on what were perceived as errors in the handling of Germany at the end of the First World War, when the war stopped at Germany's frontiers and the country and its administration remained almost intact. The Allies did not expect the war to be taken into Germany itself and were unprepared for the degree of breakdown and destruction which they had to deal with after the surrender, see Friedman, pp.13-17. These views must also have informed the drafters of the Handbook.

<sup>199</sup> This stereotyping is also reflected in instructions issued to those who would be responsible for administering the British Zone of occupied Germany, see IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-Colonel R.L.H. Nunn papers (Conshelf), Appendix C 'The German Mind' taken from No. 3 Civil Affairs Training Letter dated 25 July 1944 from The War Office. The colonial approach to the Germans is implied in the statement that 'Germany clearly does not fit into modern Europe', p.1, and also see, p. 2 'extravagant and primitive', p.6, 'primitive, emotional standards of the Germans'.

stereotype, others a more nuanced view. The serviceman could admire the enemy for being 'a good soldier' in a way that perhaps a non-serving civilian could not.

Some IWM papers show such a belief in soldiers as 'comrades in arms'. Evans articulates this belief: 'being infantry, the Germans were almost brothers-in-arms to us...' <sup>200</sup>. This concept can be seen most clearly in soldiers who fought the Afrika Korps. The desert war was seen as something of a chivalrous affair, even by British commanders <sup>201</sup> and Rommel was much admired by the men who fought against him; it was possible, after the war, for North Africa veterans from both sides to meet together on a friendly basis <sup>202</sup>. Soldiers who were captured generally received good treatment. J.L. Dixon, captured at Tobruk noted that 'usually the Germans were quite friendly when English prisoners were captured, they bore us no grudge nor showed any malice', although at the time he was put 'in the bag', he observed that the Germans were angry because the British had destroyed their own equipment to stop it falling into the hands of the enemy. However this mood did not last long, 'and in no time at all we were deep in conversation with our enemies. Cigarettes were exchanged and "Jerry" cans of water were passed around. The Germans were very friendly and offered us their commiserations on being captured...'. Dixon stated that, while the German officers still resented 'the wilful destruction of our equipment, the rank and file of the German army agreed with us that it was a soldier's duty to prevent anything of value from

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<sup>200</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, D.Evans papers (92/37/1), Chapter 12, p.11. (Evans numbers the pages of each chapter separately).

<sup>201</sup> See Field-Marshal Auchinleck's Foreword to Desmond Young, *Rommel*, London, Collins, 1959, p.10. See also IWM, Department of Documents, Captain I.B. Mackay papers (94/8/1), p.65, and IWM, Department of Documents, Colonel R. DeL. King papers (96/29/1), Richard Holmes, *Battlefields of the Second World War*. London, BBC Worldwide Limited, 2001, p.69.

<sup>202</sup> See John Bierman and Colin Smith, *Alamein: War Without Hate*, London, Penguin Group, 2002, p.2. This friendliness was not confined to the soldiers in North Africa: S.A. James describes a friendship he formed, years after the war, with the survivor of a ship which his submarine had sunk, IWM, Department of Documents, S.A. James DSM papers (01/39/1), Personal War Diary Vol. 1, Afterword.



falling into the hands of the enemy<sup>203</sup>. While he noted that provisions for the prisoners' welfare were inadequate, he put this down to the exigencies of war, not deliberate ill-treatment<sup>204</sup>. D. Moore made friends with one of his captors, Hans Korzelius. The acquaintance was initiated by the slightest of connections, the fact that one of Moore's schoolfriends had made an exchange visit to Heidelberg, Hans's home town<sup>205</sup>. Hans provided the men with some food<sup>206</sup>. Moore succeeded in escaping, only to be recaptured later: Hans made an effort to find him, gave him some food and a blanket, and provided him with information which could have aided his escape. Moore's fellow prisoners were not impressed with his association with a German, seeing it as collaboration – an indication that such friendliness was not always approved of by other Tommies<sup>207</sup>. Moore was sufficiently concerned about Hans to try to trace him after the war without success. He later traced Hans's family through a German acquaintance, and made friends with Hans's widow and her sons<sup>208</sup>.

Not all those captured in North Africa had such pleasant experiences. W. Blewitt saw the Germans as puzzlingly contradictory, capable of both great generosity and great brutality. He noted how 'both British and German [medical] teams worked untiringly...' and '...it was not unusual for the Germans to throw cigarettes or some other luxury our way'. He saw a German go into a British tank to help out a wounded British soldier, ensure that 'he was placed on a stretcher and taken off to a medical post. I watched this act of courage in amazement, believing until then that all Germans were nothing but murderers...'. However, he also saw a young guard deliberately shoot a prisoner. 'The guard was just a youngster, maybe he was a typical Nazi, I don't

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<sup>203</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, J.L. Dixon papers (87/34/1), 'In the Bag', p.5.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>205</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, D. Moore papers (96/51/1), p.6.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., pp.10-12.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p.20.



know...<sup>209</sup>. Blewitt can be seen to equate the 'bad' German with the Nazi, reflecting the view that German bad behaviour was the result of Nazi indoctrination. The most antagonistic description of German actions in North Africa is in Captain Ian Bell's memoir *...and strength was given*. Having escaped from captivity in Italy, Bell was recaptured and tortured by the Gestapo, so it is not surprising he hated Germans<sup>210</sup>. For him his desert captors were 'young Nazis'<sup>211</sup>. When a German soldier complimented him on destroying his compass, he was a 'gut Soldat', Bell experienced self-satisfaction, no comradely feelings<sup>212</sup>. He saw a German who shot an escaping Tommy as gloating over his marksmanship<sup>213</sup>. Bell's descriptions indicate an Us and Them view of the Germans, contrasting the unmilitaristic British with militaristic, ill-mannered, criminal, arrogant Nazi 'hooligans'. When the prisoners experienced a great shortage of food and water, Bell saw this as deliberate policy, although he stated that the Germans were short of supplies themselves. He made constant complaints to German officers about his men's treatment, sometimes with results<sup>214</sup>. Every incident was interpreted in terms of the Germans being cruel, callous and duplicitous<sup>215</sup>. Bell's complaints resulted in a meeting with Rommel himself. His description of the enemy general was not flattering: '...master of cunning...appetite for power...cruel determination in his eyes...a cruel record behind him...complete and callous unconcern'. However, even Bell felt the other's charisma: 'His cocksure bearing and complete disregard of danger compelled me to admire him. Whatever else he was... he was a good soldier'<sup>216</sup>.

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<sup>209</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, W. Blewitt papers (91/26/1), Chapter 1 (pages unnumbered).

<sup>210</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, R. Ian Bell's papers (87/34/1), pp.253-254.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid, p.9 and p.12.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., pp.12-13.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, pp.26-29 and p.34.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., pp.59, 60-61, 66, 67.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., pp.65-66. Nunn relates a story told to him by a Frenchman in Cherbourg of Rommel's short visit to the town, where 'his attitude was overbearing in the extreme', IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-Colonel R.L.H. Nunn papers (Conshelf), p.33.

Other British soldiers who came across Rommel felt very differently, confirming the admiration which Bierman and Smith noted. Dixon described Rommel's visit to the prisoners. The General stood on an oil drum and praised his captives, telling them he admired their 'courage and tenacity' and that they should not 'feel ashamed for [their] defeat' and ended by wishing the men luck. Dixon confirms that Rommel 'was admired by almost all the rank and file of the desert army, mainly for his daring but most of all for the way in which he conducted his campaigns'. For Dixon, Rommel's men 'fought cleanly and fairly', neither 'mistreating prisoners-of-war or using terror tactics to break down their resistance'<sup>217</sup>. Mackay told of Rommel's good treatment of a captured British officer; later, Rommel 'appeared and asked them [British prisoners] if they had been treated well and whether they had any complaints'<sup>218</sup>.

There is no doubt that once the war was over, Rommel was quickly adopted as a hero by the British. As early as 1948, Liddell Hart wrote in a favourable fashion about the Field Marshal<sup>219</sup>. In January 1950, Desmond Young's book, *Rommel* was published. 'It was reprinted three times that month, and became a best seller'. Bungay comments on how unusual it was for such a tribute to an enemy commander to be published 'just five years after the end of a cataclysmic life and death struggle'<sup>220</sup>.

Such comradely feelings were felt by other prisoners. Osborne had experienced German brutality in the days after his capture in Crete, having seen comrades shot for trivial reasons<sup>221</sup> and shortages of food<sup>222</sup> and medical care<sup>223</sup>. Nevertheless, he could

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<sup>217</sup> Dixon, 'In the Bag', p.6. This may have been a more general German practice. Osborne tells a similar story about General Student speaking to the British troops captured on Crete, see IWM, Department of Documents, M.E. Osborne papers (88/55/1), Section 1, pp.28-29.

<sup>218</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Captain I.B. Mackay papers (94/8/1), p.65.

<sup>219</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, London, Pan Books, 1999, pp.79-81.

<sup>220</sup> Stephen Bungay, *Alamein*, London, Aurum Press, 2003, p.233.

<sup>221</sup> Osborne, Section 2, 'Prisoner of War', p.7.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p.12.



empathise with some Germans. He described life as a prisoner on a working party and the 'commandant in charge...Big Bill'<sup>224</sup>. For Osborne, the latter was not a Nazi but 'of the true Prussian type, and I would now be inclined to say from the Junker class...'<sup>225</sup>. Even when Big Bill struck a fellow prisoner for calling him 'a square headed barstard [sic]', Osborne's sympathies seemed to lie with the German, 'I do not think Big Bill liked being called that...'<sup>226</sup>. He also wrote of a friendly relationship with the camp interpreter who had been a vacuum cleaner salesman in Sydenham. The two men used to reminisce about London, Mr. Brandenburg 'was never a Nazi...'<sup>227</sup>. Osborne made friends with a guard who used to bring him sketching materials in exchange for Red Cross soap, and introduced him to a German artist who gave him some tips about his painting<sup>228</sup>. When, following the 'Big Bill' incident the prisoners decided to go on strike, Osborne was very doubtful about the idea '...a strike is OK, but not right in the middle of Germany, also in the fighting forces, and last thing, not whilst bullets were concerned and could and would be used by the Nazis...'<sup>229</sup>. The strike was broken up by a Feldwebel, 'a regular German soldier, had done about twenty years, after the Rommel type he was, well built, good personality, spoke English and understood the British'<sup>230</sup>. The Feldwebel told the men to go back to work and the incident would be forgotten. When they still refused to move, he fired 'two or three shots into the ceiling, there was pandemonium, chaps got pushed out of the doors with the rush...'<sup>231</sup>. Osborne's description indicated a respect for the Feldwebel and an appreciation of his handling of the situation. He described prisoners and guards joining in 'fiddles', and expressed sympathy with the Germans' dishonesty, almost admiration: 'They had been rationed since 1936, and knew more about fiddles than anyone at that

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., p.33.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., pp.44-45.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., p.28.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p.31.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p.32.



time...<sup>232</sup>. Asquith was another prisoner who could show a friendly attitude to the German guards, deeming it appropriate to give their sentry a cigarette at Christmas, and expressing disgust at the failure of the others on the work party to be so charitable<sup>233</sup>. Euan Miller, captured at Dunkirk, noted that 'we had seen much to respect and admire in the German Army during the last ten days'. He was pleased therefore, to come across an 'unpleasant German WO, who to the end behaved in the exact manner of the Prussian bully of caricature and propaganda. In a way he cheered us up...[for] he...gave us a good object for our contempt and disgust and brought dishonour on his whole Race'<sup>234</sup>.

Barrington had been captured in North Africa, and was imprisoned in Italy when the Germans took over the Italian camp. He was favourable impressed: 'Just the same old Jerry as we saw in Tobruk, quiet and soldierlike, clean, efficient, with bags of arms and looking ready to use them'<sup>235</sup>. The 'good looking, obviously well-educated German officer' took a relaxed attitude when prisoners were discovered to be missing, 'good luck to them'<sup>236</sup>. The Germans found a quantity of Red Cross parcels which had been stolen by the Italians and sent them to the prisoners<sup>237</sup>, reinforcing Barrington's low opinion of 'the woggish Itis [sic]'<sup>238</sup>.

Blewitt also described good relations between some German soldiers and the British. While he was an escaped prisoner in Italy he met a pair of German soldiers at an inn, who befriended Blewitt and his comrade, providing them with food, beer and

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., p.20. East also remarked on the dishonesty of the guards, in a less complimentary manner, IWM, Department of Documents, A.J. East papers (87/34/1), Diary No. 2, pp.24-25.

<sup>233</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, W. Asquith papers (85/20/1), p.92.

<sup>234</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-General Sir Euan Miller papers (91/8/1), Personal Diary (2), pp.24-25.

<sup>235</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, E. Barrington papers (88/58/1 (P)), EB5, pp.428-429.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p.442.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., unnumbered page between pp.429-430.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.,p.430.

cigarettes, despite knowing them to be fugitives. 'Both of them hated the war and condemned with equal ferocity the leaders of those countries involved ... their hatred of Hitler was very intense'<sup>239</sup>. Later Blewitt befriended a German deserter, Willy Lorenz, who claimed to be from an anti-Nazi family, and helped Blewitt and another escaper out with food and cigarettes. Eventually found by a British military policeman, Blewitt tried to ensure that Willy was not 'interned in a regular prison camp', recognising that a deserter might suffer at the hands of his former comrades. The redcap suggested that, provided his story could be checked, Willy might be given 'some job behind the lines'. Blewitt described Willy as 'one of the finest men I ever knew'<sup>240</sup>.

There could be a grim side to such attitudes. Eke describes guarding a German working party travelling along a road which was under fire. The journey became a game of 'chicken', with 'the battle-hardened German veterans' who scorned taking shelter behind the sides of the truck: 'They showed no sign of fear at the prospect of being decapitated at any second by the flying shrapnel, and calmly watched us for any sign of fear or weakness'. It became a point of honour for the British to show no more fear than their captives. 'As we passed out of range of the barrage, our eyes met across the truck in almost a grim smile of comradeship at the fatal game we were playing. There would never be any friendship between the two armies, but the mutual feeling of respect for the fighting qualities and endurance of each other was apparent'<sup>241</sup>.

Some non-officers, who could be employed on work parties, formed good relations with German civilians. Osborne got on well with 'Busty', the stout boss of a metal press where the men worked. When Busty discovered that the men were stealing from

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<sup>239</sup> Blewitt, Chapter 8, pages unnumbered.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., Chapter 12.

<sup>241</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, C.R. Eke papers (92/1/1), p.172.



the pigswill bucket, he `used to bring us in a loaf of bread between us and some small cooked fishes`<sup>242</sup>. When the prisoners were moved out of Berlin to Zernsdorf, Osborne described friendly relations between the villagers and the British, including romances developing between some of the soldiers and the village girls<sup>243</sup>. Prisoners would chat to children when travelling on trains, which the children liked as a chance to practice their English<sup>244</sup>. On one occasion, after major air-raids on Berlin, Osborne was threatened by an angry crowd; he was rescued by his guard and `some women from our village ...saying you leave them alone, they help us a lot ... I really think the women saved us ...`<sup>245</sup>. As a result of one work detail, Osborne and another prisoner made friends with a girl at a local pub, trading soap and other luxuries for bread<sup>246</sup>. Asquith also describes his friendly relations with the women who cooked for his work party and how they shared a Christmas dinner<sup>247</sup>. He also got on amicably with other civilians<sup>248</sup>.

Not all prisoners showed such a friendly attitude to their captors. Charles Baker describes endeavouring to sabotage the German war effort<sup>249</sup>; he is one of the few prisoners who complained about Germany pilfering from Red Cross parcels<sup>250</sup>. He also seems to have suffered bad treatment from the Germans, being involved in a forced march from Poland into Germany at the end of the war<sup>251</sup>. He witnessed German atrocities: the shooting of those who dropped out on the march<sup>252</sup>; ill-treatment of Polish women and children<sup>253</sup>. Barrington suffered from unreasonable work schedules,

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<sup>242</sup> Osborne, Section 2, pp.24-25.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., pp.46-47.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., pp.63-65.

<sup>247</sup> Asquith, pp.91-92.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., pp.92, 94-95, 108.

<sup>249</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Charles Baker papers (87/34/1), p.5.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p.9.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid. See also IWM, Department of Documents, A.G. Fry papers (90/4/1) for details of another forced march at the end of the war, and the ill-treatment suffered by prisoners and Dixon, paper headed *Deutschland*, p.5.

<sup>253</sup> Charles Baker, p.10.



despite complaints to the Germans<sup>254</sup>; '...the Geneva Convention is just another scrap of paper nowadays, openly violated by this lousy people'<sup>255</sup>. Dibble described the handcuffing of prisoners as a reprisal for incidents at the Dieppe raid in 1942, a punishment negated by the prisoners' ability to remove the handcuffs. Eventually the guards stopped putting the handcuffs on the prisoners, merely hanging them behind the door<sup>256</sup>. Dixon also criticised German rigid adherence to 'the letter of the law', and contrasted British strict army discipline with the German system, based on fear, which led to their 'obey[ing] orders no other soldier would tolerate'<sup>257</sup>.

Some prisoners had a strong dislike of the Germans. Captain Campbell saw the relationship between prisoner and captor as a struggle to maintain prisoners' rights under the Geneva Convention against constant pressure from the Germans to 'put the relationship on another footing...' <sup>258</sup>. For him, time as a prisoner was spent in either avoiding contact with Germans or deriving pleasure from irritating them as far as possible without provoking shooting. Major Casdagli also disliked his captors. He reported a number of German atrocities, including several shootings of prisoners by German guards<sup>259</sup>. He objected to any co-operation with the Germans<sup>260</sup>.

Some prisoners report varying attitudes of their captors at different stages of the war. Campbell noted that in 1940, prisoners were treated badly; their guards became more friendly as it became clear Germany was losing the war<sup>261</sup>. Dark took a different view,

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<sup>254</sup> Barrington, Notebook dated July 1944, entry for 8 July.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., entry for 24 July 1944.

<sup>256</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, J. Dibble papers (91/26/1), p.16. See also IWM, Department of Documents, Major A.T. Casdagli papers (P463), p.30, entry for 9 October 1942.

<sup>257</sup> Dixon, paper headed *Deutschland*, p.5.

<sup>258</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, R.F. Campbell papers (93/17/1), pp.4-5. See also IWM, Department of Documents, papers of Dr. A.N.L. Munby (87/25/1), Diary kept while Prisoner of war at Laufen, 14 June 1940-19 August 1941, p.5.

<sup>259</sup> Casdagli, p.5, entry for 7 August 1941 and p.6, entry for 16 August 1941.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., pp.63-64, entry for 22 December 1944.

<sup>261</sup> Campbell, pp.6-7. East agrees, East, Diary 2, p.45.

arguing that prisoners were better treated when the Wehrmacht were successful<sup>262</sup>.

Both Miller and Munby describe varying behaviour of guards on their march into Germany after capture in 1940<sup>263</sup>. In a memoir included in his papers, Munby attributed what appeared to be deliberate German ill-treatment to the number of prisoners they had to deal with, and while he noted that he knew of rare instances of the shooting of prisoners, 'there were...no more of such incidents that one would expect when feeling were running high and it is significant that none of them were committed by the German front line troops for whom I have a profound admiration'<sup>264</sup>.

This antagonism was mirrored by some serving soldiers. Lieutenant-Colonel Baker routinely referred to the enemy as 'the Hun'<sup>265</sup>; this term was widely used to refer to the Germans, with its implication of an uncivilised, brutal, dangerous, powerful, unchristian enemy, encapsulating many aspects of the standard stereotype of the Germans. Baker related stories of German atrocities: booby-trapping of their own and Allied dead<sup>266</sup>; the killing of a friend by a 'wounded Hun he had got out of his tank to help'<sup>267</sup>; the torture of a wounded 'laddie'<sup>268</sup>. Baker had a strong desire for vengeance. Of visiting a prisoner-of-war camp for Germans, he described his desire to 'mow the

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<sup>262</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Professor P.J.C. Dark papers (94/7/1), introductory section, pages unnumbered.

<sup>263</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-General Sir Euan Miller papers (91/8/1), Personal Diary 1, pp.4-5, 10, 13-14, 22-25, 32, 35-38. IWM, Department of Documents, Dr. A.N.L. Munby papers (87/25/1), Personal War Diary Vol.1, p.14.

<sup>264</sup> Munby, memoir, p.2. This mirrors Evans' account of the man he met who considered shooting German prisoners to be acceptable, see Evans, Chapter 10, pp. 9-10.

<sup>265</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-Colonel H.M. Baker papers (87/44/1), p.1, p.4 eg. He also referred to the enemy as 'Jerry'.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p.10. This sort of activity does not seem to have been confined to the Germans: Brownlie (IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant Colonel W.S. Brownlie papers (92/37/1), p.48 relates a story about a trooper shamming dead as Germans came towards him, then throwing a hand grenade when they turned away. Atrocity stories were not always true – Crozier reported the shooting of about 20 British prisoners of war, a story widely believed at the time but subsequently proved to be untrue (IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant-Colonel H.B.D. Crozier DSO papers (P465), HBDC 1, entry for 11 April 1945).

<sup>267</sup> H.M. Baker., p.31.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p.39.



dirty so-and-so's down'<sup>269</sup>. He rejoiced at the sight of German suffering, whether it was German prisoners exposed to the November weather<sup>270</sup> or 'hundreds of German homes and buildings all smashed to hell'<sup>271</sup>. Ambrose was another who delighted in the miseries suffered by the 'Herrenvolk'. He noted how eager to please the conquered Germans were, and commented ironically that 'no one had ever been a Nazi...'. He also liked 'to be able to look at air raid damage and not feel sorry', while considering 'it is quite difficult for civilised beings like us to be as strict with the Germans as their past history obviously demands'<sup>272</sup>. As a German Jewish refugee Ambrose had more reason than many to hate his former countrymen. Blackburn, despite the occasional burst of sympathy<sup>273</sup>, disliked the Germans: 'they cannot realize that they have asked for all they have got...They are a very sly people and I think that if we are not careful they will get the best of the deal'<sup>274</sup>. He avoided the Germans, not wanting 'to pretend to be friendly with the people and then run them down behind their backs'. He obviously felt that the Germans would be willing to fight another war with the British in the future: 'I often think when I see the little boys...if we will be fighting you again when you grow up'<sup>275</sup>. Morris suggested that some were indifferent to the plight of German children. Troops returning home on trains would throw as much food as they could out of the windows to the Dutch, but for German children 'one or two searched for cigarette butts'<sup>276</sup>.

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., p.31. The conditions in which prisoners were kept are mentioned in IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant W.A. Greene papers (78/8/1 T), pp.114, 121-122.

<sup>270</sup> H.M. Baker, p.45.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., p.75. This comment was echoed on 1 March 1945: 'I never cease to get a kick out of seeing how well the Hun towns around here have been liberated and smashed to hell', *ibid.*, p.76.

<sup>272</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Kenneth Ambrose papers (96/55/1), p.359.

<sup>273</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, V.F.G.Blackburn papers (88/19/1), undated letter postmarked 13 July 1945, letter dated 12 October 1945

<sup>274</sup> Ibid., letter dated 16 July 1945.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., letter dated 4 August 1945. Similar sentiments were expressed by Dai Evans' lieutenant following an incident when his platoon had assisted a young, pregnant woman to get to hospital: 'We've spent years trying to kill the bastards then we go all out to save them. I hope that the little sod we've just helped into the world isn't fighting our children in twenty years time'. Evans, Chapter 12, pp.2-4.

<sup>276</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, K.W. Morris papers (87/44/1), p.284.



At the war's end the British Army moved into Germany itself, liberating the concentration camps of Belsen and Sandbostel, and also having to deal with both German prisoners of war and the civilian population. The unimaginably dreadful conditions in the concentration camps shocked and angered the Servicemen who had to deal with them, and the others who heard about them, including the people back home. Barclay was involved in dealing with the inhabitants of Belsen in April 1945. In a short statement (which from internal evidence was written soon after the events described) he set out the conditions found at the camp, describing the inmates as mostly 'ordinary, decent people, just like ourselves'. Some were German political prisoners<sup>277</sup>. The S.S., both men and women, were used to 'do the dirty work' and unsurprisingly were treated rather brutally 'a bayonet jab is a useful spur to energy'<sup>278</sup>. He noted with pleasure that 'Typhus has started in [the S.S.] and that combined with overwork has started to reduce their numbers'<sup>279</sup>. Unlike some others, who accepted that many ordinary German people were unaware of the conditions in the camps, Barclay, having witnessed what he had seen of Belsen, considered this enough 'to sicken us of the whole German race'<sup>280</sup>. He took a vengeful attitude to the German people and considered that any sufferings they endured were proper punishment for the atrocities they had committed.

Charters seems to have taken a fair if initially slightly antagonistic attitude to the Germans, but was roused to condemnation of the whole people after he spent some time at Belsen<sup>281</sup>. He told of visiting graves of dead camp inmates: a committed Christian, he tried to pray: '“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them”'. A few

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<sup>277</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, W.J. Barclay papers (84/59/1), pp.2-3.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p.5. See also IWM, Department of Documents, Major A.J. Forrest papers (91/13/1), Chapter 17, pp.5-6 (each chapter numbered separately).

<sup>279</sup> W.J. Barclay., p.7.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., p.6.

<sup>281</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, C.J. Charters papers (Conshelf), letters 40 (17 May 1945) and 41 (18 May 1945).

lines of prayer that have been my main code of life ... But now, for the first time in my life, I am filled with such hate and loathing that, repeat it as I will, I cannot say it with confidence<sup>282</sup>. From such a generally objective reporter, this illustrates the degree of hatred for the Germans which revelations about the conditions in concentration camps could arouse. In Charters' case it was a sudden emotion, not a long-held prejudice.

This was not so for Private Fisher of the R.A.M.C. who produced 'A Soldier's Diary of Belsen' dated 17 April 1945<sup>283</sup>. Although he described himself as 'always a man of peace', he 'found myself chuckling – even sneering' at the destruction he witnessed in Germany, blaming that country for 'start[ing] all this bloody business'. He noticed the absence of 'young or even middle-aged "Herrenvolk"'. Women, children and old men were the only Germans to be seen...Bitterness, doubt, apprehension and humiliation were easily discernible<sup>284</sup>: Fisher seems to reserve the term 'Herrenvolk' for men of military age. While he was aware of the difficulty of discriminating against children, he seems to have seen them as tainted: 'singing Nazi songs – they would stop to look at us, smile and wave their little Nazi hands'<sup>285</sup>. He went on to describe the conditions found at Belsen, 'more like a Hollywood-produced representation of a concentration camp than the real thing'<sup>286</sup>. He draws a contrast between the extremes of deprivation in the camp and the suffering of slave workers, and the well-fed local population<sup>287</sup>. While noting that staff at a nearby German Military Hospital 'claim to have no knowledge of the situation in the concentration camp', a doctor explaining that even

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid., Letter 41, p.3.

<sup>283</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, E. Fisher papers (95/2/1), p.1.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., Greene also perceives 'venom plainly written on their faces [civilians]', even the children, which he attributes to anti-British propaganda, IWM, Department of Documents, Lieutenant W.A. Greene papers (78/68/1), p.132.

<sup>285</sup> E. Fisher, p.1.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., p.4..

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p.1.



talking about such things would have led to his being shot, the tone of Fisher's comments suggests that he does not really believe the denial<sup>288</sup>.

Captain Barer states that 'people...accuse me of being pro-German...' <sup>289</sup>. After time spent at Sandbostel, his views hardened. He considered that the S.S. and the Gestapo should all be exterminated, even if there were non-Nazis in their ranks. 'Anyone who can stand by and watch human beings treated as they were at Sandbostel has forfeited his right to live' <sup>290</sup>. He also felt that some blame attached to the whole German people. They had evaded their responsibility for what went on in their prisons, 'I can forgive them almost everything except that' <sup>291</sup>. They had turned a blind eye to the ill-treatment of the Jews; 'perhaps in the future they'll be more careful to investigate instead of ignoring' <sup>292</sup>. However, he produced an explanation for German attitudes and took a positive approach to re-education of the Germans accepting that the 'vast majority' of the German people knew 'nothing of the conditions' inside the camps, since these were 'closely guarded by the S.S. and no ordinary German was allowed anywhere near them'. He emphasised the terror felt for the Gestapo and the SS. But he considered that all Germans must be told about the camps; in his opinion, films, article and pictures 'are not enough, they leave one with a sense of unreality'. He suggested taking 'some of the German Doctors and nurses who worked at those camps on lecture tours round Germany' <sup>293</sup>. This discussion, of how much the Germans knew about the camps, was a difficult one. Opinion was divided between those, like Barer, who, while perhaps feeling the ordinary German ought to have been concerned, believed that they

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>289</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Captain R. Barer papers (Conshelf), letter dated 5 May 1945.

<sup>290</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Captain R. Barer papers (93/11/1), Report entitled 'Sandbostel-April 1945', p.7.

<sup>291</sup> Barer, Conshelf, letter dated 5 May 1945.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., letter dated 10 July 1945.

<sup>293</sup> Barer, Report (93/11/1), pp.6-7. Charters agreed with this idea, commenting that 'I wish every possible German could be conducted around the camp [Belsen] to see with his own eyes what his blind faith and idolatry of the Nazi creed made possible, or what his fear allowed to continue', Charters, letter dated 15 May 1945, p.5.



were ignorant of the conditions in the camps<sup>294</sup> as there were measures in place to discourage any curiosity, and those who felt that they must have known<sup>295</sup>.

Barer also records his initial reaction to the inmates: 'One felt no pity for these people – only loathing and disgust. It would have been best if I'd poured petrol on the place and burnt everything'<sup>296</sup>. He reiterated the point in his report, saying that what he had seen was 'so terrible that all feeling of sympathy or pity had been driven out. All I felt was horror, disgust, and I am ashamed to admit it, hate' for the prisoners for being as they were. As for the S.S., 'once having reduced their prisoners to such a state the only emotions the guards could feel were loathing, disgust and hate'. While not excusing them, Barer felt it provided 'some reason for their extraordinary behaviour'<sup>297</sup>.

Barer saw the conditions at the camp as caused by perverted human actions rather than defects in German character. 'Otto's [his German medical orderly]<sup>298</sup> eyes were filled with tears. He was bitterly ashamed of being a German. I was ashamed of being human. No animal could possibly have sunk to such depths of cruelty'<sup>299</sup>.

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<sup>294</sup> Charters expressed similar opinions to Barer, letter dated 8 June 1945, pp.4-5. Captain Jupp, (IWM, Department of Documents, Captain M.F. Jupp papers (91/21/1), letter dated 19 April 1945) stated that 'I am convinced that the average German is not aware of what goes on in these camps'. Forrest notes German reactions to descriptions of the camps which suggest they were not aware of the exact nature of what went on there; they also claimed that 'it would have been dangerous to ask questions', IWM, Department of Documents, Major A.J. Forrest papers (91/13/1), memoir entitled *Scenes from a Gunner's War*, Chapter 17, p.7 (chapters numbered separately).

<sup>295</sup> Nunn expressed his doubts about German ignorance, Nunn, p.115, as did Searle, IWM, Department of Documents, Kenneth A. Searle papers (92/31/1), p.20.

<sup>296</sup> Barer, Conshelf, letter dated 3 May 1945.

<sup>297</sup> Barer, Report (93/11/1), pp.4-5. These feelings of disgust were echoed by Eke. He and his comrades went to see former camp inmates: 'We were repelled by a feeling of evil and illness emanating from these poor, unfortunate people, as if they had absorbed the evil they had endured into themselves', Eke, p.226.

<sup>298</sup> Barer, Report, p.2.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p.4. Dark made a similar comment: 'Predatory play, which goes beyond just pleasure to deviant ends, must be a characteristic of only one animal, man', Dark, first section, pages unnumbered. The German commandant of the prisoner of war camp (an area of which had been taken over for the political prisoners in the concentration camp) also remarked to Barer that 'at this moment I am ashamed to be a German', Barer, Conshelf, letter dated 3 May 1945.

The revelations of the concentration camps did not prevent British troops from becoming acquainted with, sympathising with, even developing friendships with, the Germans they were amongst. The official policy of non-fraternisation was much criticised, difficult to enforce and widely violated<sup>300</sup>. Charters had always been against the order and wrote a carefully argued denunciation of the policy to his wife, objecting to the newspapers' interpretation of the policy as 'sex', an interpretation which he saw as resented by the troops. While some men were fond of a good time, others found it difficult to ignore children, others wanted 'to know something of the country and the Germans' way of thinking', or could not 'feel unfriendly to anyone' and their curiosity would lead to secret interactions. The policy encouraged immorality. The need for clandestine meetings would alienate 'decent' girls, resulting in the men consorting with the other sort, who could be 'picked up' with a wink and a smile'. With the British men long deprived of female companionship and so many German men prisoners of war or dead, assignations were inevitable. He considered the whole policy counter-productive, commenting on the bad feeling which had already been aroused and stating of 'youths who are so great a problem. If their Nazi education did not make them hate us, I am sure that the evils brought about by non-fraternization has done. We speak airily of re-educating them. How much of our teaching will they accept when they have no reason to respect us? How can we expect them to love their neighbour when we show no signs of practicing what we preach?'

'Practically everyone fraternizes in one way or another', and enforcement led to thousands of officers and men being due for courts martial. Charters considered that those responsible for the order, while probably aware it was an error, were unwilling to admit it; therefore, while widely ignored, it was still enforced. He thought it damaged

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<sup>300</sup> Friedmann states that 'the rigid policy of "non-fraternisation", which was certainly justified for a limited period...broke down immediately and completely in the field of sexual intercourse'; for this and further criticism, see Friedmann, pp.43-44.



relations with the Germans, and could even give Germany an excuse to start another war<sup>301</sup>. A later letter gives amusing examples of the extent to which Germans and British would go to elude the imposition of the policy<sup>302</sup>.

Forrest confirms that the policy was unpopular: 'To many it appeared unethical and inhuman. At no time had we consciously waged war against women and children'<sup>303</sup>. He cited several instances of innocent-seeming incidents which were regarded as fraternisation<sup>304</sup>, and he himself broke the rules, befriending a chambermaid, a friendship 'which survives to this day'<sup>305</sup>. Both Forrest and Greene note the enthusiastic reception by the British of German musical concerts, and both see this as a form of fraternisation. For Greene 'this was a clear case of fraternisation en masse!...it occurred to me that this was the death knell for Monty's "non-fratting" policy'<sup>306</sup>. For Nunn, 'at home its most ardent advocates were those who had seen no fighting and possibly suffered little in the war. Its most strenuous opponents seemed to me the fighting soldier who had fought hard from Normandy to the Ruhr'<sup>307</sup>. On the other hand, Brownlie, when informing his troops about the non-fraternisation order, heard 'a voice from the back: "Fraternisation? Blaw their bluddy heids aff"'<sup>308</sup>. Jupp considered the policy 'the correct one at the start of the occupation of Germany...The Germans must be made to feel, collectively, what the world...thinks of them'. However he thought it important to explain to the Germans why 'the whole world'

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<sup>301</sup> Charters, letter dated 24 June 1945. See also Jupp, undated letter, which evidence suggests was written between 18-19 April 1945 and VE Day.

<sup>302</sup> Charters, letter dated 14 July 1945.

<sup>303</sup> Forrest, Chapter 18, pp.1-2.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., Chapter 19, p.2.

<sup>306</sup> Forrest, Chapter 19, p.7, Greene pp.160-161, dated 27 June 1945.

<sup>307</sup> Nunn, p.134.

<sup>308</sup> Brownlie, 'Germany 1945-46', p.2.



condemned them, 'for they clearly don't know. Otherwise our behaviour will strike them as either barbaric or just peculiar'<sup>309</sup>.

The war and the entry into Germany could arouse many conflicting emotions. Evans described shooting a young soldier. After the battle he found the teenager, hideously wounded but still just alive; he died very shortly after. Evans 'felt devastated'. He recognised the irrationality of this feeling, putting it down to 'that ghastly wound combined with his being alive'<sup>310</sup>. Brownlie described opening fire on what he thought were men in slit trenches. To his horror, the figures were civilians 'followed by a horse and cart on which were piled all kinds of household goods'. Two children ran towards him, 'right up to the tank, looked at me, and the small boy said in English: "You have killed my father". There was nothing I could say'<sup>311</sup>.

Flanagan also came across difficult situations. He was troubled when a senior officer ordered civilians to bury rotting carcasses shot by the retreating Germans 'to see the middle-aged couple and their servants picking up the pieces and carrying them to the pits'. The soldiers, 'Jocks', appeared to have no such qualms, swearing and ordering the Germans around<sup>312</sup>. Later he and his men took over a farmhouse, evicting the inhabitants who left with a few of their possessions. The group consisted of 'the old lady...two or three old men, a young woman of about thirty or so and a child, followed by a middle-aged woman'. To Flanagan's horror, his men began to snatch their belongings from the people<sup>313</sup>. When he tried to intervene, he was politely sent away by his RSM. He was shocked at the sight of his men behaving 'as I had always imagined German soldiers to behave'. He had an image of 'Tommy Atkins' as being

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<sup>309</sup> Jupp, letter, undated.

<sup>310</sup> Evans, Chapter 4, pp.16-17.

<sup>311</sup> Brownlie, p.92.

<sup>312</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Captain T.H. Flanagan papers (87/19/1), p.48.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p.50.

kind to children and the old and could not understand why his men were behaving in this way<sup>314</sup>. Later Flanagan experienced a battle with Hitler Youth, who deliberately shot a wounded man lying in no-man`s-land. This incident caused him to re-evaluate the robbing of the civilians and his men`s behaviour: `perhaps they too had been through an experience that rid them of the façade of decency towards your enemy`<sup>315</sup>.

The men`s actions do not seem to have been motivated solely by hatred of the enemy. On subsequent occasions they behaved with friendliness to Germans, for example when they met a farmer who had been a prisoner of war in England during the First World War who provided them with a breakfast of fried eggs<sup>316</sup>: or when they were billeted on an elderly German couple. Although the woman was initially frightened of them, `the Jocks...with their boisterous cheerfulness innocently put [her] at ease`. The couple had lost their son at the beginning of the war, which prompted sympathy<sup>317</sup>.

The eviction of civilians in order to provide accommodation for British troops seems to have distressed some soldiers. Blackburn told his correspondents about the eviction of a woman and her `five small daughters` from the house in which he was billeted. The men protested that `they would sooner sleep on the trucks...you know how soft hearted we are, but the officers would not hear of it`. Blackburn was pleased to be able to report that the family were staying with friends and, since the men `looked after her house she does not mind`<sup>318</sup>. The tone indicates that Blackburn himself may have had no qualms about the operation, it was his comrades who disliked the process. Nunn expressed his dislike of the process, even when carried out `humanely`. He acknowledged people back in England might `scoff at such squeamishness`, seeing

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid., pp.60-61.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>318</sup> Blackburn, undated letter postmarked 13 July 1945.



`such hardships' as being what the Germans deserved. They however did not have to enforce the policy<sup>319</sup>. He was less concerned in the case of a Nazi couple who had alternative accommodation<sup>320</sup>.

There seems no doubt that British troops could, on occasions, commit cruel acts, as the incident Flanagan described suggests. Evans describes the shooting of surrendering prisoners: a man who had `calmly shot' an officer, then surrendered, `...was...almost torn to shreds as just about everyone within sight shot him'<sup>321</sup>. On another occasion, after hard fighting and a British man being shot as he entered a house, `no prisoners were taken and several Germans were bayoneted as they attempted to surrender; this may sound cruel and somewhat inhuman, but it is a bit much to expect mercy from inflamed men who have been taking casualties up until a moment previously'<sup>322</sup>.

Prisoners could also be shot almost by accident, as when a nervous soldier fired in their direction without thinking<sup>323</sup>.

Evans drew a distinction between incidents of killing in the heat of battle and the deliberate murder of unarmed prisoners. `I never shot a prisoner under any circumstances...The mere idea of shooting a helpless man appals me'. However he had seen it and heard of its being done. He described an argument between himself and another man who equated `killing Germans with toughness'; he would take no prisoners. Evans saw this as unacceptable; aside from the moral aspect, killing surrendering prisoners would result in German reprisals. The other pointed out that Germans had killed prisoners in the past. While Evans accepted this, he saw it as the exception, `most Jerries seem like us'. What angered Evans was that his opponent had

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<sup>319</sup> Nunn, pp.133-134.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>321</sup> Evans, Chapter 6, p.9.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., Chapter 8, p.11.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., Chapter 6, p.9. See also Chapter 11, p.15.

never seen action.<sup>324</sup> Evans was not above giving a young soldier who was 'being supercilious' a hard time and reducing him to tears, an action he subsequently regretted. 'He and I shouldn't have been spending our youth trying to kill one another...we were both too young for what we were undergoing and our heads were full of what we ought to be like...but weren't'<sup>325</sup>. Brownlie confirms that there could be rather distasteful bullying of the male civilian population. He describes an incident when he found himself driving his jeep behind a lorry 'that refused to give way. When I eventually passed, I stopped it and made the large, burly driver get out. I made him bend over, and gave him half-a-dozen strokes on the bottom with my cane, which he meekly accepted. So much, one reflected, for the theory of the Herrenvolk'<sup>326</sup>.

Despite this limited evidence of ill-treatment of prisoners, the IWM archive indicates that German prisoners were treated as well as they could be in the circumstances; there were obvious difficulties attendant on dealing with the large numbers of German troops surrendering to the Allies at the end of the war. The S.S., the Gestapo, and the Hitler Jugend were regarded as particularly dangerous. I have already mentioned the treatment of the S.S. in concentration camps, and Barer's opinion that they should all be liquidated. Charters devoted a letter to his thoughts on the S.S. People in the 'liberated countries would tell us "The German soldier is good, smart and kind – but the S.S., they were brutes"'. He depicted the S.S. as privileged, 'the picked specimens of the master race'; he noted immorality in 'women...told it was their duty to the Vaterland to go with any stormtrooper who may desire them'. He characterised the S.S. as fanatical Nazis, cruel, behaving like gangsters in the occupied countries. 'As

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid, Chapter 10, pp.9-10.

<sup>325</sup> Evans, Chapter 6, pp.21-22. A certain amount of hectoring of young prisoners seems to have occurred. Brownlie described some 'very young' prisoners, 'blubbing and weeping as they ran back along the dusty road, urged by the boots of our infantry', Brownlie, p.81.

<sup>326</sup> Brownlie, 'Germany 1945-46', p.3. This might be seen as an example of what Friedmann calls 'the colonial mind', Friedmann, p.46.



soldiers they were ruthless, hard, and stubborn. Their greatest virtues were a cast-iron discipline and faultless dress; their greatest vices too numerous to mention'. He saw the ordinary German soldier as 'little different than the British soldier'; they were allowed to find their own way to prisoner-of-war cages. The S.S. however were kept imprisoned and heavily guarded, always being escorted to confinement under guard. One odd comment Charters made was quoting a Belgian: 'They sang like angels and behaved like devils'. He noted that there were a few women in the S.S. and of them 'I have heard nothing but wickedness and cruelty'<sup>327</sup>.

Those in the *Waffen* S.S. were anxious to point out to their British captors the difference between the two branches of the organisation. Evans describes one commander explaining that the *Waffen* S.S. were fighting soldiers, unlike the *Allgemeine* S.S. 'who had gained a bad name even throughout Germany'. Evans was not convinced: 'we had heard of the fanatical fighting – and the atrocities – carried out by the SS men. Even the ordinary German soldiers feared them ... regarding their *Fanatismus* with caution'<sup>328</sup>. Osborne relates an incident which indicated that some of the SS had a sense of humour. 'I thought thank God some of them had a sense of humour (after all the SS I ask you)'<sup>329</sup>.

Blewitt confirmed the bad reputation of the SS when being a hunted escaped prisoner in Italy: 'being hunted by the ordinary German soldier was vastly different to being hunted by the German SS...' <sup>330</sup>. He too noted an antipathy between the Wehrmacht and the SS and Gestapo<sup>331</sup>. Even Bell appreciated there was a difference: captured by

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<sup>327</sup> Charters, letter dated 9 June 1945.

<sup>328</sup> Evans, Chapter 12, pp.12-13. Osborne also mentions learning of this difference from SS troops, information he seems to have accepted at face value, see Osborne, Section 2, p.87.

<sup>329</sup> Osborne, Section 2, p.63.

<sup>330</sup> Blewitt, Chapter 6.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid., Chapter 8.

the Italians, he was handed over to `normal army personnel, and, so far, I was glad of that`. He was well treated by these men, contrary to how he was dealt with later<sup>332</sup>.

Dark describes the petty annoyances experienced by prisoners from the Gestapo, especially `Goosey`<sup>333</sup>. However when a visiting Gestapo agent lost his revolver during a search (it was later returned on a `no questions asked` basis), Dark felt the incident `was one up for us and for “our” ferrets, who were habituated to our ways as we to theirs`<sup>334</sup>. Goosey was not likeable, but was safe and familiar. Later Dark described SS atrocities, the taking of political prisoners out into the Baltic, handcuffing them together and throwing them into the sea. When British troops arrived, Dark noted, `Our Tommies are pretty bitter as the S.S., though fanatical fighters, treat prisoners taken in battle shockingly. They had found men with the arms tied behind their backs half burnt, beaten up, hung from a tree, etc.`<sup>335</sup>.

The Hitler Jugend was another group that soldiers regarded with distaste because of their fanatical fighting abilities. Flanagan recounts one incident where a wounded man in no-man`s-land who screamed with pain was shot by the Hitler Youth on the other side. For Flanagan `I had identified my true purpose. I was fighting evil`<sup>336</sup>.

Later Flanagan saw a Hitler Jugend prisoner being led down the road by one of his `Jocks`: shots were heard, followed by the return of the escort who had shot the youth: `It was me, Sir. He kept on saying “I die for my Führer...I die for my Führer...well...the bugger`s dead...! Aye...he is..`. His Company Commander was lost for words. Two German civilians, a mother and daughter, had seen the incident in the meadow and the mother conveyed to the British `her horror at what she had seen

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<sup>332</sup> Bell, Book IV, p. 246.

<sup>333</sup> Dark, section entitled `Incarceration: Life in Captivity`, pages unnumbered.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid. See also Mackay on the SS shooting of American prisoners, Mackay, p.117.

<sup>336</sup> Flanagan, pp.60-61. Barer also comments that `It`s beyond understanding how these Hitler youths will fight on knowing they are lost`, Barer, letter dated 6 August 1944.



during the night<sup>337</sup>. Flanagan called them 'the fanatical Jugend'<sup>338</sup>, and noted the extreme youth of many of the prisoners captured, referring to one group of about a hundred 'led by a boy of around twelve'<sup>339</sup>. Osborne claimed that the Hitler Youth 'hated our guts, and us them'. The Hitler Youth told the village children that the chocolate the British handed out was poisoned 'and tried like all these party groups to poison their minds, but the kids were not stupid and would not believe them...'<sup>340</sup>. Dark comments of one young officer that 'he struck me as being rather cock-sure and perhaps a product of the Hitler Youth...'<sup>341</sup>.

Greene however thought the situation of the Hitler Youth in PoW cages 'a hopeless start in life...I felt sorry for them and angry with the system which had so palpably led them astray. They looked so young and for the most part rather bewildered'. He thought their situation, mixing with the older men, undesirable: 'to think that these 14-15 years old boys could have been enjoying life and freedom if only they had had wise national leaders'. He saw German women weeping and waving to the boys as they were marched away<sup>342</sup>. His interpreter informed Greene that membership of the Hitler Youth, initially voluntary, soon became compulsory: membership involved a uniform 'he admitted the German's love of uniforms', and gave the boy power – even his own father 'daren't hit him by way of correction' when he was wearing it<sup>343</sup>. Greene later took part in action against a 'local Hitler Youth leader' who had failed to hand in 'his uniform and regalia'. Fear of what would happen to her boy reduced his mother to

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<sup>337</sup> Flanagan, p.62. East notes the story of 'a young Nazi soldier of about sixteen tender years and as he lay dying he kept muttering, "I love my Führer, I love my Führer"', East, Diary No. 2, p.48.

<sup>338</sup> Flanagan, p.61.

<sup>339</sup> Flanagan, p.86.

<sup>340</sup> Osborne, Section 2, pp.53-54.

<sup>341</sup> Dark, first section.

<sup>342</sup> Greene, pp.119-120.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., pp.159-160, dated 25 June 1945. Perry Biddiscombe quotes many historians as suggesting that the Third Reich itself was responsible for a break with the older Germany of the First World War period and before, citing in particular that 'the paternalism of German family structures began to erode as the Nazi regime itself encouraged youth autonomy, or at least the association of youth with rival forms of authority such as the Hitler Youth', Biddiscombe, p.218-219.

tears. 'I was silenced by the pathos of the whole affair. To think that Germany's youth had found its expression and joy in such tomfoolery, such mock pageantry, such playing-at-soldiers'<sup>344</sup>. Charters described a visit to a 'kindergarten for the Hitler Youth'. He noted the good facilities, while criticising 'the trash [the children] were taught', including the propaganda element, 'the need for living room, ...the history of the German people showing their pure descent and...books on the glories of National Socialism and der Führer'. For him, the fact that the children 'like good soldiers...had destroyed their equipment so that the enemy might not use it', despite these being 'things that must have meant a lot to them' was evidence of 'how deeply the military streak has been drilled into them'<sup>345</sup>.

British soldiers varied between those who hated the Hitler Jugend for their fanatical resistance and brutality and those who could sympathise with them, seeing them as misled rather than inherently bad and pitying them for their wasted youth. Perhaps many felt both: Evans's comrade, Geordie's comment summed up a certain exasperation, an awareness of danger combined with a perception of stupidity on the young Germans' part: '...what if a silly twat of a Hitler Youth is parked somewhere with a Spandau to make a last stand?'<sup>346</sup>.

Relations between German civilians and the occupying British troops are generally depicted as good<sup>347</sup>. Initially German civilians were frightened of the invaders. Greene describes wariness in young women at the sight of a British soldier<sup>348</sup>, and relates an incident when he had a wide-ranging conversation with a young schoolmistress who

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<sup>344</sup> Greene, pp.192-193.

<sup>345</sup> Charters, letter dated 20 May 1945.

<sup>346</sup> Evans, Chapter 11, p.18.

<sup>347</sup> Friedmann agrees: 'The British veteran soldier was a good ambassador in Germany...', Friedmann, p.45.

<sup>348</sup> Greene, pp.143-144.



seemed very nervous at discussing 'difficult' topics such as propaganda and the Bolshevik 'menace'<sup>349</sup>. In each case he assumes the nervousness is attributable to some cause other than fear of the British<sup>350</sup>, apparently unable to believe that civilian Germans could fear the occupiers. When he was billeted on an older German couple, Flanagan sensed in the woman 'beneath this bubbly exterior there was a terrifying fear', and appreciated the woman's concern not to offend her uninvited guests<sup>351</sup>. Greene noted that children 'looked at us in a frightened way [which] ... upset many of our men, for your British soldier has a winning way with the younger generation'<sup>352</sup>. Jupp may explain why. He describes how one of his friends entered a German house and found a group of men, women and children 'convulsed with grief'. They were convinced the British would shoot the children. 'When Laddie explained that he didn't do that sort of thing, the children accepted it and brightened up at once: it took 5-10 minutes, however, to convince the grown-ups'<sup>353</sup>.

However, if the objections to non-fraternisation are taken as a guide, many of the occupiers wanted to be on at least reasonably friendly terms with the people they were dealing with. Some still had reservations. Cope saw scenes which might have aroused sympathy: however, he considered 'they asked for it...no doubt this would have been our fate had the master race been successful'<sup>354</sup>. He had strong views, regarding German men as discourteous to women and 'generally ... very boorish'. He agreed that 'the Nazi way of living was the highest expression of the German mind', and thought the only way it could be 'eradicated' was 'complete annihilation'<sup>355</sup>. Such

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<sup>349</sup> Greene, pp.117-118.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., pp.150-151 and 117-118.

<sup>351</sup> Flanagan, p.84.

<sup>352</sup> Greene, p.132.

<sup>353</sup> Jupp, letter, portion with date missing.

<sup>354</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, E.W.Cope papers (80/37/1), letter dated 8 December 1945.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid, letter dated 24 January 1946. Cope seems convinced that the Germans would start another war in the future, see letter dated 12 February 1944. Later he seems more optimistic, in a letter dated 23 October 1944, describing 'German citizens weeping for the loss of their house and home...Perhaps it is

feelings did not prevent him from taking piano lessons from a 'rather small, plump, pleasantly humoured and greyhaired' teacher<sup>356</sup>, terms which suggest he regarded her in a more favourable light than the ill-mannered German men he came across. Cross was another who felt little empathy for the enemy. He described dealing with German refugees from the Russians. These people were in a parlous state, terrified at the thought of being overtaken by the 'Russkis', lacking food and water and then forced to stop and camp by the British who did not want them clogging the lines of supply. Cross displays a certain amount of contempt for them and indifference to their fate. He states: 'we have appointed little führers to see that latrines are dug ... disease is there, and the people are in poor condition to withstand it'. But at least the refugees are out of doors, thus hampering the spread of disease: 'Better that a few old ones should die of pneumonia than a lot of others from typhus etc.'. He summarised his feelings as: '...tired and disgusted, and I can't get the smell of Germans out of my mouth and nose, no matter how much I clean my teeth. Disgust, contempt and a little pity mix ill'<sup>357</sup>.

Many others could, however, sympathise with, and eventually develop good relations with, Germans. Forrest described a discussion with some of his fellow officers, two of whom were all in favour of harsh measures to be directed against the Germans 'basing, I felt, their behaviour on the harsh measures that would have been enforced by Hitler's minions'. When he expressed sympathy for the civilians he was seen as typical of most British people 'who will most certainly forgive the Germans and bring about another war, more brutal and bloodier, in twenty years time'. He quoted a comrade who considered that unnecessary destruction was 'uneconomic, unprincipled and unlikely to gain any respect from German civilians...you couldn't have 80 million people left in

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as well, for a good tide of war into innermost Germany would sweep a good deal of military nonsense, and the glory of war and nation, out of their minds, and replace it with a good solemn respect for peace and good order!'

<sup>356</sup> Ibid, letter dated 19 January 1946.

<sup>357</sup> IWM, Department of Documents, Captain C.T. Cross papers (91/8/1), letter dated 4 May 1945.



the middle of [Europe] embittered, hungry or derided<sup>358</sup>. He noted that the local civilians did not cause the British any trouble, indeed, some went out of their way to be helpful, reporting the hiding places of SS men 'to the Military Police'<sup>359</sup>.

Forrest remarked that what these people thought of their occupiers would matter 'enormously' in the future<sup>360</sup>. In the occupied territories he had harsh things to say of the Germans, 'a mail-fisted, bellicose people'<sup>361</sup>, but once in Germany his views altered somewhat. He considered the Germans 'succumb[ed] to...insidious manipulation of their minds', led astray rather than inherently bad<sup>362</sup>. 'The more I see of the German people the more I hate the very sound and trappings of war. Why – I do not properly know. It's not that I feel we should be kind to the Germans. Perhaps it is that seeing them looking so much like ourselves and realising the affinities of the European family that a revulsion sets in...'<sup>363</sup>. It is a measure of the effectiveness of the Us and Them propaganda that Forrest could have expected the Germans to appear radically different from the British. He insisted on correct behaviour towards the enemy, priding himself that his unit 'had behaved well', treating 'the inhabitants with aloofness rather than hostility'<sup>364</sup>.

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<sup>358</sup> Forrest, Chapter 16, p.4.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. Later Forrest noted they had received 'no trouble to date from civilians, not a sign or threat of Werewolf activity or sabotage', *ibid.*, Chapter 18, p.12. Greene notes that the Germans showed 'a docile obedience to authority', Green, p.132. Evans indicates that civilians could be very helpful to the British, whether from desire to minimise damage to property or from fear of reprisal, see Evans, Chapter 8, p.12. He later notes that while there were some 'terrorist activities' against British troops, 'front-line troops found the German population – and even German army units – only too willing to hinder fanatical Nazis in their attempts to carry out such activities', *ibid.*, Chapter 11, p.16. Nunn also notes that the population 'were cowed, starved and also probably too intelligent to divert their energy' into opposition, Nunn, p.173.

<sup>361</sup> Forrest, Chapter 13, p.4.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid., Chapter 16, p.6. Later he describes evidence of propaganda directed at schoolchildren, *ibid.*, Chapter 18, pp.7-8.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid., chapter 16, pp.6-7.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid., Chapter 18, p.1.

Greene described varying attitudes in the inhabitants of different areas. One town, Goch, he thought a Nazi town: here he felt 'patent hostility'<sup>365</sup>, and 'Rees struck me as being a Nazi town'<sup>366</sup>. However in Bentheim, which had not been much affected by the war (which suggests that Rees had been badly bombed or shelled) the inhabitants showed 'a friendly attitude ... towards us'<sup>367</sup>. He got on well with some Germans: the schoolmistress mentioned earlier<sup>368</sup>; one of his interpreters<sup>369</sup>; Greta and her artist sister<sup>370</sup>; he was invited to a birthday party at Herr Soltar's house<sup>371</sup>; he visited an attractive blonde for a 'singing session' where the girl, Helga, played the piano<sup>372</sup>. He even respected 'the Witch' who 'disliked us and was openly honest about her feelings'<sup>373</sup> - from his description she was a rather charming young woman which might explain his tolerance towards her opinions.

While he does not see all Germans as genetically 'evil', Greene had definite ideas about the German character, which reflected the stereotype and which he saw as reinforced by his experiences<sup>374</sup>. He summarised the German character at one point: 'their inbred, childish regard for uniforms and the trappings of war, their love of dictatorship and over-organisation, their ruthlessness in victory and their abject bowing and scraping in defeat, their lack of that saving grace a sense of humour ... their easy moral standards'<sup>375</sup>. While he met Germans he liked, the more he talked to Germans the more they baffled me. They were so enigmatical. They were quite unlike us'<sup>376</sup>.

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<sup>365</sup> Greene, p.99.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., p.103.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., p.108.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., pp.117-118.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., pp.159-160 and 167-168.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., pp.176-178.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., pp.183-184.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p.195.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., pp.174-175.

<sup>374</sup> See eg. Greene, pp. 79-80, 103.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid., p.189.



Unable to reconcile his assumptions and observations about the German character with the individuals he met, Greene resorted to regarding the people as unfathomable.

Nunn was a Civil Affairs and Military Government officer, 'in close contact with the actual inhabitants'<sup>377</sup>. His papers provide a detailed description of the difficulties encountered by the man on the ground in dealing with the day-to-day administration of Germany. Initially he spent some time dealing with a rural agricultural area with a couple of small towns and two large villages, and some factories, mostly 'little more than village craft workshops'; there was little war damage<sup>378</sup>. He was waiting to go to his main assignment, the Tiergarten Detachment in Berlin<sup>379</sup>, at that time occupied solely by the Russians. He had no difficulties with the local officials; although Nunn doubted the ability of the Landrat for his job, he found the man 'very conscientious', and giving 'the fullest co-operation'. The Landrat's second-in-command was 'extremely efficient and hard-working'. The administration was 'a good lot, typical probably of the average German civil service, knowing their job but lacking in imagination and initiative'<sup>380</sup>. Nunn himself showed plenty of 'imagination and initiative' when dealing with an infestation of Colorado beetle. Lacking the equipment and manpower for the usual German remedy of spraying against the insects, Nunn 'arranged for the school children to go into the fields and hunt for beetles. This had the added advantage of keeping the children employed and out of mischief. The schools had all been closed down until such time as new teachers could be appointed, free of any tendency towards Nazi doctrines'<sup>381</sup>. Inspection of the local hospitals showed they were 'extremely well-run, like all the German hospitals, and, of course, spotlessly clean', although lacking basic supplies. He noted the way 'badly wounded men of the

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<sup>377</sup> Nunn, p.1.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., p.122.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., pp.126-127.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., p.131.

Wehrmacht` were called to attention as he entered a ward<sup>382</sup>. This contrasts with other reports of hospitals where cleanliness and good treatment had broken down; perhaps the contrast between a country area well away from any fighting and the war zones<sup>383</sup>.

When Nunn finally arrived in Berlin he found the city in a deplorable state: `ruins stretched for mile after mile and it was not a question of noting destruction here and there, but of finding any building which could possibly prove in any way habitable`<sup>384</sup>. The Russians had made little effort to clean the place up: sewers were not repaired, corpses not buried; side streets `were generally quite impassable owing to the accumulation of debris which blocked the way`; roads were littered with burned-out and abandoned vehicles<sup>385</sup>. They had, however, `re-established municipal government`, with, Nunn had no doubt, the intention of ensuring that local government was administered by Communists<sup>386</sup>. He found dealing with the Russians difficult: `extremely pleasant and most hospitable socially`, `in business matters they were not easy`, being inclined to `work to rule` and to be very suspicious of the British<sup>387</sup>. The Russians busied themselves removing machinery from the British sector; only occasionally were the British successful in preventing this<sup>388</sup>. Nunn also described `the kidnapping of German civilians by the Russians`, especially technicians, actions he attributed to `bad hats` in the Russian army rather than to the senior officers `who deplored these incidents as much as we did`<sup>389</sup>. The sight of German suffering at the

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid., p.130. The formality of German military manners was remarked on by others: Mackay noted the disciplined behaviour of surrendering German troops, pp.49, 109, as did Eke, pp.157 and 212, although he and his comrades were angered by this rather than admiring. East, Diary No. 1, p.4, Miller, Personal diary 1, p.24, and Dark, section 1, all mention the punctilious saluting, heel-clicking and handshaking.

<sup>383</sup> Flanagan tells of the appalling conditions in a hospital he inspected, p.93. He also mentions the formality of the behaviour of bed-ridden patients towards senior officers, p.92.

<sup>384</sup> Nunn, p.140.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., p.141.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., pp. 152-153.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., pp.154-155. These problems continued, as Nunn later describes, until he got some British troops as reinforcements, see pp.164-165.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., pp. 180-183.



hands of the Russians had a distinct effect: 'The British Tommy naturally became violently anti-Russian and very much pro-German'<sup>390</sup>.

Nunn experienced problems with denazification. The burgermeisters installed by the Russians were impeccably anti-Nazi but not very competent. Nunn's comments about the efficiency of the Nazi administration suggests he would have preferred to deal with Nazi bureaucrats<sup>391</sup>. He also saw that there were degrees of Nazism, some had bravely stood out against the regime, others had temporised<sup>392</sup>. The communist-appointed burgermeister began to confiscate food and other goods from 'so-called Nazis' and put in place a system of informers to spy on the population. For Nunn, 'it seemed to us that the German people were really in danger of exchanging the terror of the Nazi Gestapo for a similar secret service of another political colour, but equally cruel'. He put a stop to these activities<sup>393</sup>. Replacing the burgermeister proved difficult, the preferred candidate having minor Nazi associations<sup>394</sup>.

Life in Germany was hard: 'chain gangs of women were employed to clear away rubbish from the pavements. The people themselves seemed apathetic and indifferent. There was no sign of hostility towards us...they deemed themselves lucky to be in a British controlled sector'<sup>395</sup>. The food shortages led to an increase in prostitution<sup>396</sup>.

Nunn's sympathy was tempered by his realisation that 'the Germans, during a large

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid., pp.159-160.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., p.210. For a detailed description of the ultimate failure of the policy of denazification see Biddiscombe who notes that 'historians have long realised that the British had attached less importance to denazification than the Americans...', p.14; the chapter on British denazification policy is entitled 'A Modest Purge', pp.83-117. See also Crozier, HBDC 5, Report No. 2 on Political Situation and Public Opinion in Essen, pp.2-3 on German civilian dissatisfaction as what was perceived as Nazis' avoidance of unpleasant physical work, and pp.5-6 on the particular difficulties relating to the mining industry.

<sup>393</sup> Nunn, p.195.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p.202.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., pp.218-219.

part of the war...had been living on the plunder of Europe<sup>397</sup>. He was aware that 'unless we can offer the Germans some encouragement we create a fertile breeding ground for another Hitler'<sup>398</sup>. He also had to deal with large numbers of returning prisoners released by the Russians. Their state was appalling, uniforms 'in tatters', many lacking any footwear; 'a great number were wounded or crippled'; they were filthy and needed delousing; they were hungry<sup>399</sup>. Nunn felt 'much pity for these one time, no doubt, fine soldiers of the Wehrmacht', who now 'had no idea where their families were or if they were still alive'. Worse still, the men were unfit for work, and the 'food and comfort' which would be needed to bring them back to strength was not available. Civilian refugees were in an even worse state and were difficult to control, lacking the discipline of the soldiers<sup>400</sup>.

Nunn considered that 'the average German' felt no guilt for what had happened to their country. While most claimed to be anti-Nazi, Nunn expressed his disbelief. However, '...it was quite impossible to harbour feeling of any hostility to these unfortunate wretches'. They might, actively or passively, be responsible for 'the horrors of war, but they were certainly paying the price now'<sup>401</sup>. He noted that Germans were followers rather than leaders, but also saw them as 'very politically minded'<sup>402</sup>, although they had 'little conception of democracy as we know it'; perhaps the long period of Nazi dictatorship accounted for both the interest in politics and the ignorance of 'democracy'. Nunn saw Germans in terms of the stereotype, kicking, or being kicked by, others: 'a sentimental, romantic people, easily swayed by a skilled orator'

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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p.225.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., p.187.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., p.172. Evans makes similar comments about Nazi party membership: 'If every Frenchman who had "killed a German soldier" had been telling the truth, it was a miracle that the German army had survived the occupation; if every German who claimed to have "opposed Hitler" had been truthful, then the Nazi Party could never have come to power', Evans, Chapter 6, p.25.

<sup>402</sup> Nunn, p.205.



and probably `ripe for another dictatorship`<sup>403</sup>. German politicians were in politics for personal gain<sup>404</sup>.

Charters `confesses` to no feeling of pity, despite the tragic scenes he witnessed of refugees, their possessions piled on `all kinds of wheeled conveniences` searching, many in tears, for the ruins of what once had been their homes, `for in my mind was too vivid a picture of even more tragic sights which the sons and husbands of these people had created in Europe`<sup>405</sup>. However, as time passed his feelings changed. Even in Belsen he found Germans to praise: `all here agree that the hardest working and most energetic body in the whole of Belsen are – the German nurses. These girls have done remarkable things and the medical orderlies declare that they put the English sisters to shame...I mentioned [them] because they do deserve mention and you will read nothing of them in the papers`<sup>406</sup>. In one letter he discussed German civilians, noting that `the civilian in Germany has suffered as much as anyone in this war, possibly much more`; he was aware that civilians had little say in the decision to go to war and were unable to register as conscientious objectors. The Nazi system created a climate of fear of the authorities and of denunciation by neighbours, friends and family, a fear, reinforced by the threat of the concentration camp, which, despite Allied occupation, still remained: there were those `eager to “sell” their neighbours to gain good favour of the Allies`. He saw this fear as accounting for Belsen: `to speak of such matters or even to take too much interest would have landed the German` in the camps. `When we pass judgement on “horror” camps we must be very careful to lay the blame where it belongs and not with the average civilian...remember that these camps were originally built for Germans...`. Seeing the devastation caused by RAF bombing,

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid., pp.207-208.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid., p.206.

<sup>405</sup> Charters, letter dated 11 April 1945, pp.1-2.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid., letter dated 12 June 1945.

Charters thought that 'the Germans have paid in kind for all the sufferings that their armies ... caused to civilians in other countries. They had...paid in full'<sup>407</sup>.

Charters' comments on non-fraternisation cited earlier indicate that early on the British and German civilians interacted and could even form friendships. He continued to keep his family informed about German sufferings: the barter system because money was valueless; the 'extortionate prices' on the Black Market; the homeless refugees, and demobbed soldiers trying to find their homes; the limbless men in hospitals<sup>408</sup>. In Altenau, a former winter sports centre, troops fed 'the crowd of young children waiting outside a dining hall for the scrapings off the plates', and the children would 'struggle for discarded cigarette ends to take home'<sup>409</sup>. He later told of his friendship with a young German boy in Goslar, and visiting the boy's family. He noted how little food they had, and he handed around some biscuits he brought with him, and cigarettes. Heinz's father was reported killed, but his mother had been told that he had been seen alive. On Charters' second visit, there was no coffee and the fire had gone out because 'there were no matches to re-light it'. 'I left that house a much wiser man. I knew that conditions were bad for the Germans but never realized how very bad they were'<sup>410</sup>.

Evans seems to have had a very friendly attitude to German civilians and to sympathise with their plight. He spoke some German, having been taught by a fellow soldier, Bishop, who had fought in the International Brigade in Spain. This man spoke German well 'and hated the Nazi regime – though not the German people – with a fierce passion. He blamed the militarism of the Germans upon their educational system,

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., letter dated 8 June 1945. He later reiterated his belief that Germany's sufferings during the war constituted a 'fitting retribution', letter dated 9 September 1945.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., letter dated 11 August 1945.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., letter dated 9 September 1945.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., letter dated 31 January 1946.



which imposed planned discipline and obedience to authority as a normal thing<sup>411</sup>.

Maybe Bishop's views influenced Evans' attitude. Evans acted as the platoon interpreter, dealing with the German people the unit came across. He was not indifferent to German feelings, suffering acute embarrassment over his and his companions' unseemly burst of laughter as a German family tried, with considerable difficulty, to fit their grandmother's body into a coffin which was slightly too small<sup>412</sup>. He took an interest in the German way of doing things<sup>413</sup>. His descriptions of the group's interaction with civilians reveals friendly relations – trading eggs for cigarettes, for example<sup>414</sup>. He and his officer went to apologise to a German farmer for the killing of some of his hens. The farmer 'made light of it, saying he himself had been a soldier *in dem ersten Weltkrieg*...and he knew how young men behaved...Like so many Germans with whom we had to deal he had expected far worse treatment from us, perhaps more in line with what the Germans themselves had dished-out in other countries'. The farmer gave Evans and the officer a meal of liver sausage, black bread and butter. The officer half-joked that he hoped the food was not poisoned, much to the farmer's amusement. Evans apologised to the German for the suspicion, pointing out that 'the officer was new to the front and was probably still full of the idea – promulgated in Britain during the war years – that all Germans were imbued with fanaticism about being the *Herrenvolk*...and would do anything to kill their enemies'. The farmer claimed to be anti-Nazi, about which Evans was very sceptical<sup>415</sup>.

Evans tried to behave in a kindly way to Germans. On one occasion he found himself in an ambulance with a twelve-year old German boy. He recognised the trauma for the

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<sup>411</sup> Evans, Chapter 8, p.7.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., Chapter 5, pp.20-21.

<sup>413</sup> His interest in the difference between German and British coffins, for example, *ibid.*, Chapter 5, p.20. He also tried to improve his German vocabulary, keeping a dictionary with him, *ibid.*, Chapter 6, p.20.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid., Chapter 6, p.21.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., Chapter 6, pp.24-25. Evans emphasises this point: later he notes of one village that the people were 'relieved to find we were not sub-human after all', *ibid.*, Chapter 11, p.13.

child of 'being taken over by' an enemy he had 'been taught to believe are brutal and savage' and whose language he did not understand. He followed the incident up to ascertain how the boy was and discovered that he had recovered and been well-treated<sup>416</sup>. After the surrender, he assisted with taking a young pregnant woman to hospital, and was asked by the sister there to thank his officer for the latter's humanity<sup>417</sup>. He emphasises the friendly way in which he and his comrades treated German civilians, and is rather contemptuous of those who acted differently. He quotes a major who 'ignore[d] the German, adopting the airs of a conquering hero'. This man was 'shocked to witness the friendly way in which our troops treated the German civilians who were nearly all women, children and old men', threatening to 'court-martial any I may find co-habiting with a German woman'<sup>418</sup>.

Evans confirms that a considerable amount of 'fratting' went on: 'on the one hand there were sex-starved young men; on the other were women and girls who were happy to be treated civilly and welcomed the cigarettes, chocolate and so on which they hadn't seen for months'<sup>419</sup>. His services as an interpreter were called on to assist in assignments. He had no qualms about organising for one of his comrades to visit a local prostitute, or turning a blind eye to members of the platoon 'shagging' two Luftwaffe women who surrendered to them, and who were quite happy to oblige for cigarettes and food. His attitude was very different when a drunken man started 'mauling' a young girl who, with her mother, had been caught out after curfew<sup>420</sup>: or when he was asked to act as 'an intermediary' with two girls whom he considered as 'decent sorts, obviously well brought up...friendly but not free with themselves'. The

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid., Chapter 10, pp.1-2,

<sup>417</sup> Ibid., Chapter 12, pp.2-4.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid., Chapter 11, p.13.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid., Chapter 11, p.14.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid., Chapter 12, pp.19-25.



Germans were 'relieved to find the British soldiers so decent in their behaviour', in contrast to the Russians about whom 'stories were already circulating'<sup>421</sup>.

Even during the war some soldiers looked kindly on the civilians they found themselves amongst, as I have already indicated. This kindness sometimes had an ulterior motive. East describes how some prisoners would 'give little German children bars of chocolate...They would help mothers up steps with their prams, which is an act of chivalry apparently unknown in the Greater Reich'. However, the aim of these gestures was, East claims, subtle attempts to undermine German morale<sup>422</sup>. In 1945, East could feel some sympathy for German civilians: 'Hundreds of German civilian refugees were seen streaming by the camp on Saturday. There were women and children and covered wagons. Although many of the fellows said they deserved it, I could not help feeling compassion for them, especially the children'<sup>423</sup>. The behaviour of the Russians prompted the Padres to bring into camp 'all the German families living around the neighbourhood for protection against rape and plunder. Old women, expectant mothers, and babies were escorted by British and Americans'<sup>424</sup>.

The padres were clearly at the forefront of trying to alleviate civilian suffering, later East mentions that they 'tried to prevent the worst of the vandalism'<sup>425</sup>. Like others, East had some sympathy for the Russians, seeing their actions as taking 'vengeance' for German 'brutalities'<sup>426</sup>; but he could also have a friendly conversation with a German youth about Russian behaviour (and be given some cigarettes)<sup>427</sup>, and praise the generosity of a Hauptmann who, after his own home in Dresden had been

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid., Chapter 12, pp.17-18.

<sup>422</sup> East, Diary No. 2, p.20.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., p.61. There is a similar comment for 23 April 1945, *ibid.*, p.88.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid., pp.90-91.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p.92.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., p.91.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., p.93. This incident was on 25 April 1945.

destroyed, ‘‘with malice towards none and charity for all’’... gave a Terroflieger one of his ration cigarettes<sup>428</sup>. He tends to attribute German acts of kindness to mercenary motives, seeing the offer of coffee and water by women and children as the prisoners marched west as a way of stopping ‘our fellows forcing their way into their houses for spoils’<sup>429</sup>.

Now free, the men stopped at Riesa ‘a large industrial town on the Elbe’, where East and some comrades took over a service flat. When the owner appeared with her two children, one of the men, ‘with a remarkable spirit of generosity’, invited the family to tea. The woman accepted. East noted that she and the children were careful to hide any Nazi emblems. He noticed a considerable amount of fraternisation going on between ex-prisoners and the local population. The locals were pleased to have British men in their homes, ‘it offered them some protection against Russian soldiers’. Some lived ‘very comfortably with German families. Two were actually living with two German girls’<sup>430</sup>. At the end of the war there could be very friendly relationships between British ex-prisoners and the civilians they found themselves amongst, although East himself seems ambivalent about this.

Searle is another prisoner who confirms the generally friendly relations between local people and the prisoners, with the prisoners giving the children chocolate from ‘our own Red Cross parcels’. Some villagers invited ‘German speaking Kriegies into their cottage kitchens’; meals were prepared using PoW ‘tinned steak’ and vegetables

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid., p.72.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid., p.97. He made a similar remark earlier in connection with the guards, who became more friendly as they sensed Allied victory approaching, *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid., pp.98-99. See also pp.100-102.



provided by the hosts<sup>431</sup>. Trading could take place, as when a 'peasant' bartered eggs and bread for chocolate and tobacco<sup>432</sup>.

When marching west in the closing stages of the war, Dark thought the German people 'fairly friendly on the whole'<sup>433</sup>. The guards were amicable, 'the attitude of the Hun was friendly and incredible in the light of their previous experiences in the last few days...'<sup>434</sup>. He attributed this to the enemy's having 'had it' rather than to natural amiability. He felt sympathy for the enemy's plight, but also contempt as German organisation descended into chaos. Some civilians made a good impression: the kindly woman who sent her children out with water for the men, 'some charming little boys and a girl, the best mannered children we had come across and that's saying something'<sup>435</sup>. They met an elderly man and his wife who asked for a cigarette. 'Their son of twenty one who was a Lieutenant in the Luftwaffe, was killed three years ago on the eastern front; the woman was quite charming and rather sad'<sup>436</sup>. However, the sight of the destruction in Hamburg was seen as 'the bitter bit': 'if a man unleashes such power he so tentatively controls, he could bring total destruction upon himself so easily'<sup>437</sup>. He enjoyed a certain *schadenfreude* at seeing his erstwhile gaolers behind bars, although he felt some sympathy for one or two whom he saw as particularly decent<sup>438</sup>.

Attitudes of soldiers towards their German counterparts could change very quickly once the war was over. Eke finished his memoir with the description of a hunting expedition he undertook with 'a veteran sergeant from the Afrika Corps... We were not

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<sup>431</sup> Searle, p.4.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>433</sup> Dark, Third section, 'On the March', pages unnumbered.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

strangers or enemies, we had worked together for two or three weeks, the war had been over six months, and the feeling of trust was instinctive'. The two men located a 'small family' of deer in the mountains. The German shot one of them, Eke aimed wide. 'The German turned and looked at me, then shook his head slowly as his weathered face creased into a puzzled smile. I could read his thoughts quite easily: "How on earth did these people ever beat us"...I grinned back into his hard eyes and asked myself the same question'<sup>439</sup>. Eke interpreted the situation in terms of himself as 'in my heart...still a civilian. Six years of army training had not altered my natural compassion for life...'. He saw his German companion as naturally warlike, describing how the man suggested that within two years 'you and me fight together against the Russians'. Eke was convinced that there was no question of this, but saw 'the excitement of war was still in his eyes, and in his imagination he was already there'<sup>440</sup>. Eke's interpretation of the scene displays strongly stereotypical national images of the British as naturally peace-loving against the hard, militaristic Germans. The German's shooting of the deer is proof of this, in contrast to Eke's soft-heartedness towards the animals. He ignores, although he has already informed the reader of this, that the Germans 'were always hungry', and the main impetus for the expedition was a prisoner's suggestion that the deer were available (by implication for food)<sup>441</sup>.

Evans contrasts two German officers he took prisoner. One a U-boat officer appeared 'proud, defiant and scornful of us "decadent British". He seemed the very personification of ...the ideals of Hitler and the Nazis'.

Looking back, I can only admire the man. There, surrounded by the six of us, he maintained defiance even in the face of a possible beating-up. He was the

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<sup>439</sup> Eke, pp.232-233.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., p.233.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid., pp.232.



type any country loves to have on their side. His medals proved his valour, won in a desperate and claustrophobic calling<sup>442</sup>.

The wording suggests that Evans' admiration came later, rather than being what he felt at the time.

The next day Evans came across a party of infantrymen 'marching along with some semblance of order and discipline'. Their young officer was proud that none had deserted, and made 'a small ceremony' of surrendering to Evans<sup>443</sup>. Evans noted the relaxed atmosphere between prisoners and captors and he was delighted when the Germans 'broke into one of their marching songs...it was wonderfully evocative and I recall the words still'<sup>444</sup>. When they parted, the young officer 'asked to shake hands with me, thanking me for my...decency'<sup>445</sup>. Evans mused on the contrast between these two officers; 'the U-boat officer...would rule with assured authority; the ... Leutnant ...would lead by example. Each equally effective in his own way – but I would prefer the latter every time'<sup>446</sup>.

Like British civilians, servicemen could have widely varying attitudes to the Germans, from outright hostility to all Germans to a 'take as you find' approach. Evidence indicates many reasons why soldiers might strongly dislike the Germans: German ill-treatment of prisoners (which however did not inevitably lead to hostility, as the evidence of Osborne, discussed earlier, shows); the effects of German bombing on the civilians back home; German mistreatment of civilians in the occupied countries; the

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<sup>442</sup> Evans, Chapter 12, pp.6-7. Evans is very aware of the difference between his feelings looking back and his reactions at the time. Earlier he described the shooting of a spotter for German artillery. 'Though at the time I merely thought, "Good. Another German bastard gone", I now salute the man as a very brave soldier indeed', *ibid.*, Chapter 3, pp.17-18.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 12, p.10.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 12, p.11. Evans seems to have particularly admired the German soldiers' singing, having earlier got a man 'to write down the words of the *Horst Wessel* song ... Whatever its ancestry or connotations it was, and is, a wonderful and evocative marching tune', Chapter 9, pp.7-8.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 12, p.11.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid.*

terrible conditions in the concentration camps. Judging by the number of times it is mentioned, the concept of the Master Race seems to have irritated many. Possibly the suggestion that any race could be superior to the British offended British *amour propre*.

However, in 1955 Germany was admitted into NATO, and Service personnel began to work in partnership with men who, only ten years before, they had been trying to kill. While it was the development of the Cold War which turned the Germans into Allies against the Soviet threat, the basis for a less hostile, even a friendly, relationship between the British and the Germans was already present.

Soldiers could have respect for their enemy and an admiration for soldierly qualities. Those who were most antipathetic to the Germans tended to be those who had suffered particularly at their hands, Captain Ian Bell being a good example. While some, especially officer, prisoners kept aloof from the enemy, others could respect some of the Germans they encountered<sup>447</sup>. Other ranks, who could be required to work, went out among the German civilian population and some developed good relationships with the people they came across; this was not always approved of by their fellows, as Asquith's evidence indicates. At the end of the war, some prisoners, at liberty among the German population until they could be repatriated, found themselves sympathising with German civilians, especially the women and children.

For both former prisoners of war and soldiers coming into Germany as part of the occupying forces, interaction with civilians could promote sympathy for the sufferings of these people. Children's deprivations were very likely to provoke pity, but many felt for women, and the elderly, especially when they learnt of losses of sons. Some British

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<sup>447</sup> Dark, second section, 'Incarceration: Life in Captivity': 'most of the time one blotted out the physical presence of Germans...'.



soldiers could ill-treat German civilians, but this may have been in circumstances where they themselves had just experienced hard fighting or instances of German brutality towards themselves. Brownlie's physical chastisement of a lorry driver who offended him indicates there was another side to British occupation: the bullying, however occasional, of the local population.

Many felt that the sufferings of the Germans both during and in the aftermath of the war 'served them right' for what they had done to the occupied countries. However, most acknowledged that the Germans were suffering badly, and the opinion was voiced that they were paying in full for what had been done in their name. While this may not appear a promising basis for future good relations, it could be seen as 'wiping the slate clean'. The suffering of the German people in the immediately post-war period was an expiation for their sins and would lead eventually to absolution. Charters, for example, sees the Germans as having paid in full for what they had done.

While all who knew of the conditions in Belsen and Sandbostel were deeply shocked by what they saw and felt complete revulsion for those who had treated their fellow man so badly, many were prepared to believe that the ordinary German had not known of what went on in the camps, although others were less sure of the ignorance of neighbouring populations. Barer is careful to point out that asking questions about the camps was likely to result in the curious finding themselves imprisoned. However, he commented privately to his wife that maybe people had a responsibility to monitor the conditions in their nation's prisons, and that they were aware of discrimination against the Jews even if they did not know where such anti-Semitic policies finally led.

Barer's initial reaction to the sight of the inmates of Sandbostel was not pity but revulsion, a response which he suggested gave him some insight into how the S.S.

could have treated fellow human beings so cruelly. This reaction was echoed by Eke, suggesting that, though perhaps uncommon, it was not unique. The reprisals against the S.S. in the camps, forcing them to 'do the dirty work' and treating them harshly suggests that they were seen as the primary culprits. Barer saw them as so tainted that they should be exterminated. Several suggested that forcing Germans to see what the camps were like was a suitable method of re-education (both Barer and Charters consider this would be a good idea); Barer in particular argued strongly that simply telling people of the conditions in the camps was insufficient, seeing for themselves would have a far greater impact.

Many soldiers drew a clear contrast between the Wehrmacht, whom they saw as ordinary soldiers like themselves, and the S.S., the Gestapo and the Hitler Jugend. The latter three groups were seen as true fanatical Nazis. In the case of the Hitler Jugend, some allowance was made for their youth and the fact that they had been exposed to indoctrination from a young age. The S.S. and the Gestapo were hated and despised, although there was a recognition that the *Waffen* S.S. might be less repugnant than their *Allgemeine* counterparts; some prisoners seem to have taken a rather proprietorial view of their own 'ferrets', seeing them as undesirable but familiar, unlike the visitations from outside security details. Sometimes those with whom the soldier made friends were regarded as almost automatically non-Nazi, as Flanagan indicated. One can see here the revival of the distinction between Nazi and ordinary German which was prevalent in the early stages of the war.

German service personnel were rounded up as prisoners of war, although many were released fairly quickly to allow them to help with the harvest for the year. Thus the people the occupying forces found themselves amongst consisted mainly of women and



children, the elderly and the sick and wounded, not the militaristic *Herrenvolk* of the German stereotype, but an unarmed, docile, frightened people; in the towns they were trying to survive among the ruins of their homes and suffering from severe food shortages. In the country areas, many of which were virtually untouched by war and where the food supplies were good, conditions were better. The dislike of the non-fraternisation order indicates that many occupiers would have liked to make friends with Germans, even if this might often be for low motives; several mention the difficulties in keeping sex-starved young men and willing German women apart. These relationships may often have had a commercial basis, the women bartering sex for food or for unattainable luxuries such as chocolates and cigarettes; in the barter society after the collapse of the *Reichsmark*, cigarettes were the currency.

Friendly relationships could blossom between the British occupiers and the German population. Some evidence indicates that genuine, even if on occasions brief, friendships could develop between soldiers on opposing sides on the battlefield.

The situation of being occupiers forced many British into working closely with the Germans, as Colonel Nunn's description of his time in Military Government indicates. On occasions there could be elements of a colonial attitude on the part of the British administrators. Britons might be wary of the Germans, finding elements of German behaviour and attitudes rather alien, but they could also recognise in them a fellow Christian, European people with much in their history to admire – the enthusiasm of British personnel for concerts given by German musicians indicates that. Certain perceived German characteristics, their toughness, fighting ability, courage and warlike nature, which were undesirable in an enemy were of great value in an ally; the beginning of the Cold War meant such military virtues were in demand.

### CHAPTER 3 - CINEMA IN THE PRE-WAR PERIOD (1930-1939)

During the 1920s and 1930s, British cinema suffered, as did other European cinemas, from the dominance of Hollywood. The fact that British governments tried to protect the native film industry through the Cinematograph Act of 1927, which gave rise to the much-criticised 'quota quickie', and a further Act of 1938 is an indication that the importance of the influence of cinema in popular culture was recognised. The Acts' effectiveness in promoting British cinema is debatable<sup>448</sup>.

John Sedgwick suggests that many British films were 'demonstrably popular with domestic audiences' at a time when 'cinema was the dominant paid leisure activity in Britain'<sup>449</sup>, and quotes Jeffrey Richards' view that middle-class audiences 'were more favourably disposed towards British films than working-class audiences'<sup>450</sup>. This is supported by Sue Harper's research into the admissions figures at the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, for this period. The catchment area of this cinema was lower middle class<sup>451</sup>, and the Regent showed more British films than the quota required<sup>452</sup>, some of which were very popular<sup>453</sup>.

Some British films made during this period dealt with Germany, either being set during the First World War, or alluding to aspects of German society and culture, including those which could be seen as critiquing, even if obliquely, the Nazi government after its

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<sup>448</sup> See H. Mark Glancy, 'Hollywood and Britain: MGM and the British "Quota" legislation' in Jeffrey Richards, ed, *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1998, pp.57-72.

<sup>449</sup> John Sedgwick, 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s' in Jeffrey Richards, ed, *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema, 1929-1939*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1998, pp. 1-35, pp.1-2.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>451</sup> Sue Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s: admissions figures at the Regent Cinema, Portsmouth, UK' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 24, No. 4, 2004, pp.565-587, p.568.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid., p.570.

<sup>453</sup> Ibid., p.571.



coming to power in 1933. However, those wishing to make films on the subject of Germany and the Germans during the inter-war period were not free to depict Germans as they chose. Films were subject to certification by the British Board of Film Censors which 'banned "subjects which are calculated to wound the susceptibilities of foreign people"' <sup>454</sup>, a prohibition which included Nazi Germany until the declaration of war. There were good reasons why 'no overtly anti-Nazi film would be permitted': the concern about offending a 'friendly' nation at a difficult time <sup>455</sup>, and the risk of civil unrest in view of 'the disturbances which attended Fascist marches and rallies in Britain' <sup>456</sup>. The Germans were ready to protest to the British Government against the release of films they regarded as particularly anti-German <sup>457</sup>.

However, Germans did not have to be shown in a good light. While many of 'the early talkies' First World War films had an anti-war theme, others 'were adventure espionage stories in which the Germans were invariably the bad guys' <sup>458</sup>, and these 'previously established First World War genres assumed a more germanophobic character' after Hitler's takeover of power in 1933 <sup>459</sup>. Films critical of Nazi policies could pass the Board, provided such messages were disguised, for example *Jew Süss* (Lothar Mendes, 1934) dealt with anti-Semitism in Germany within the context of an historical epic. Robertson notes that the BBFC must have been aware 'of the contemporary parallel with Germany' <sup>460</sup>, and this was noticed by at least one reviewer at the time <sup>461</sup>. The film was also popular <sup>462</sup>.

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<sup>454</sup> Jeffrey Richards, 'The British Board of Film Censors and Content Control in the 1930s: Foreign Affairs' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1982, pp.39-48, p.39.

<sup>455</sup> See observation from Colonel Hanna quoted by Richards, *ibid.*, p.40.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

<sup>457</sup> See James C. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors: Film Censorship in Britain, 1896-1950*, London, Croom Helm, 1985, p.91, and James C. Robertson, 'Dawn (1928): Edith Cavell and Anglo-German Relations' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.4, No. 1, 1984, pp.15-27.

<sup>458</sup> James C. Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.91.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid.*, p.92.

<sup>460</sup> James C. Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema: British Film Censorship in Action, 1913-1975*, London, Routledge, 1989, p.61.

Even after 1933, not all British films were anti-German. An example which puts forward a more sympathetic portrait is *Brown on Resolution* (Walter Forde, 1935, based on a book by C.S. Forester), later entitled *Forever England*. The Admiralty co-operated in the making of the film<sup>463</sup>. Starring a young John Mills, it consists of two parts. The first concerns the romance between a girl of humble origins and a young naval lieutenant in 1893 (and her refusal to marry him because of the class difference between them), the second the child of that union, Albert Brown, who joins the Navy and heroically sacrifices his life to ensure the sinking of a German battleship during the First World War.

Just before the outbreak of war Albert and his ship, *Rutland*, are docked in Valparaiso, where he and his shipmates encounter three German seamen from *Zeithen*. The playing of the scene indicates an initial undercurrent of hostility, quickly dispelled when Bert and his German counterpart, Max, discover a mutual interest in boxing; they arrange a match for the next day. This impromptu event is interrupted by the arrival of the British and German officers, but they give their blessing to its continuing. The scene ends with Max and Bert singing 'Danny Boy' together, but the friendly party is broken up when the German captain, Von Lutz, receives urgent orders and leaves. Officers and men of both sides are shown as getting on well together. The Germans' hasty departure may be a hint at German trickiness in taking advantage of foreknowledge of the declaration of war: Max is bigger than Bert (and as he points out to Bert, *Zeithen* is larger than *Rutland*), so there may be a hint of German readiness to fight those weaker than themselves, but the general impression is of maritime camaraderie.

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<sup>461</sup> G.A. Atkinson, *Era*, 10 October 1934.

<sup>462</sup> John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain: A Choice of Pleasures*, Exeter, University of Exeter, 2000, Appendix 3, p.267. It was a medium success at the Regent, Portsmouth, see Sue Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s', pp.574, 582.

<sup>463</sup> Review, *Variety*, 16 May 1935.



Subsequent scenes show the *Zeithen* raiding merchant ships, creating havoc on the nitrate trade route vital for British interests. The film follows the less well-armed *Rutland* as she chases *Zeithen* and, after an exchange of fire, is sunk by one of *Zeithen*'s torpedoes.

Most of the British crew are lost, but Albert and his pal, Ginger (Jimmy Hanley) are rescued; thus the Germans are shown observing the rules of war and saving the crew of the defeated vessel. On the German ship the two men are well treated; the singing of 'Danny Boy' heralds the arrival of Max, who appoints himself steward to the two Britons. He has even had one of the sailors repair Albert's watch. Later Albert is interrogated by the German commander; there is a slight hint of threat during this exchange, but no suggestion that Albert is mistreated.

*Zeithen* has suffered damage to her hull and the captain anchors at Resolution Island to undertake repairs. Albert manages to escape with Ginger's connivance. Holed up on the island with a rifle, he snipes at the Germans repairing the hull. The first one he shoots – hesitating before pulling the trigger – is his friend, Max. The Germans send a landing party to capture Brown; he fends them off, but as they retreat one of them manages to wound Albert. Ironically, Brown had earlier refrained from shooting the man because the party was leaving.

In a final attempt to finish the repair work, *Zeithen* shells the island, alerting *Leopard*, a pursuing British battleship. In the action which follows, *Zeithen* is sunk. The British search the island and find Brown, dead. On board *Leopard*, its captain, Somerville, talks to Von Lutz, who has lost both his ship and his son. Somerville, sympathetic,

asks if there is anything he can do, and Von Lutz asks him to bury the men on Resolution, paying tribute to Brown, 'a very brave boy'. Somerville, who has been handling Brown's watch, opens it and realises that his son, too, is dead. The final scene shows a cross on Resolution.

While not overtly promoting an anti-war message, the film shows the futility of war. British and Germans can get along well together – there is no inherent antipathy between them. To carry out his plan Brown has to kill his friend, who has shown him great kindness since his capture. As Somerville points out to Von Lutz *Zeithen* stood no more chance against *Leopard* than *Rutland* did against *Zeithen*. At the end of the film, two middle-aged men are left to mourn their sons.

*Kine Weekly* would have liked 'a little more flag-wagging' but otherwise thought 'the picture is splendid, popular entertainment magnificently British in design, execution and sentiment'<sup>464</sup>. Others expressed reservations, while still appreciating the battle scenes<sup>465</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* considered the film was perhaps too fair to the Germans, commenting on its careful avoidance of 'militarism and jingoism' and its being 'scrupulously fair to the qualities of the German Navy and its men'. However, 'in refraining from any statement of the course of the war and emphasising the comradeship between the British and German sailors it tends to reduce them to puppets governed by forces outside themselves'<sup>466</sup>. This may, of course, have been the film-makers' intention. *Film Weekly* went further, regarding Brown's actions as 'not at all heroic in practice...The German seamen are unarmed and exposed to his fire in the execution of their duty...Brown is...reduced to the status of a "sniper"...[and]

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<sup>464</sup> *Kine Weekly*, 23 May 1935. *Variety*, 16 May, 1935, also gave the film an enthusiastic review,

<sup>465</sup> *Observer*, 19 May 1935 and *Sunday Express*, 19 May 1935.

<sup>466</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 16, 1 May 1935, p.51.



ultimately shot dead by pure accident'<sup>467</sup>. This is an extreme view: the seamen trying to rivet a replacement plate onto the hull may be unarmed, but their ship and the landing party are not; Brown's aim, to stop a raider from preying on merchant shipping, is legitimate, the two sides are at war; Brown's life is at risk, if not from the landing party then certainly from the ship's guns. The quotation suggests that sniping is not a legitimate form of warfare (although both sides used snipers during the First World War), and perhaps indicates a distaste for war themes. *Film Weekly* implies that the Germans are unfairly treated; young Albert is not 'playing the game'.

These critics reflect a divergence in British attitudes to the Germans during the early to mid-Thirties: there were those who distrusted the Germans (especially since Hitler came to power) and who saw Germany as a continuing threat to her European neighbours; and there were those (such as the members of the Peace Pledge Union) who rejected war as 'a continuance of diplomacy by other means'. The film was popular, at least at the Regent, Portsmouth<sup>468</sup>.

Robertson sees Saville's 1936 film *Dark Journey* as opening 'a germanophobic trend'<sup>469</sup>. The film deals with espionage activities in Stockholm (in neutral Sweden) during the spring of 1918. The plot centres on the activities of three major players in the spying game: the British, represented by Bob Carter (Anthony Bushell), the French in the person of Madeleine Goddard (Vivien Leigh) and the German, Baron Karl von Marwitz (Conrad Veidt). Madeleine appears initially to be a Swiss national working for the Germans, but is later revealed as a loyal Frenchwoman feeding false information to her German 'masters'. Von Marwitz poses as a German deserter when

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<sup>467</sup> *Film Weekly*, Vol. 13, No. 345, 24 May 1935, p.29.

<sup>468</sup> Sue Harper, 'A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s', p.572.

<sup>469</sup> Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.97.

he is in fact working for his country. Madeleine and Von Marwitz meet and fall in love while each is ignorant of the other's true identity.

Eventually Madeleine discovers that Von Marwitz is the head of the German spy ring in Stockholm; in the meantime he has ascertained her true allegiance. In a key scene they discuss running away together, but both realise that wherever they go they cannot get away from the war. Reluctantly they part, each placing duty to country above love.

Madeleine is very frightened of the German spy network, which she is convinced will kill her, and indeed they attempt to abduct her. This is thwarted, and she is deported (courtesy of the British who see this as a good scheme for getting her out of the Germans' reach). Her ship is stopped by a submarine and Von Marwitz comes aboard to arrest her. She is rescued by a British Q-ship which sinks the submarine (and then rescues its German sailors). Von Marwitz is put aboard a waiting British destroyer, although the captain of the Q-ship assures Madeleine that he will be safe, the British treat their prisoners properly (and Von Marwitz is arrested in uniform, so at that moment is a serviceman rather than a spy). The film ends with Madeleine calling to Von Marwitz that she will be waiting; at first he yells back that he cannot hear her, but she reiterates the message and the final shots are of them waving to each other – an implication that they will be reunited in the future.

The film does have anti-German aspects. One scene trades on the idea of the Germans as a regimented horde: information is sent to Berlin. We see, in quick succession, several lines of young men at machines transmitting the information, then shots of marching German feet complete with knee-high boots. There is the emphasis on U-boats. The opening scenes show the sea, then the periscope of a submarine, then a ship



on the sea, with activity inside the U-boat. After a warning shot has been fired across the ship's bows, it stops. The Germans board and arrest one of the passengers, despite the ship's officer's protests that the man is a civilian. The German's claim that the man is a Belgian spy is supported by the fact that the audience has already seen him skulking in his cabin, checking his appearance against his passport photograph. In one amusing scene, Gertrude, Madeleine's German shop assistant, is asked by the porter, 'Who are you to give me orders?' a remark which prompts the French girl, Colette, to answer 'She can't help it, she's German'. Gertrude is outraged, claiming that she is Viennese. Colette is unimpressed, 'That's just German in waltz time'. This little scene relies for its humour on the German reputation for enjoying both giving and obeying orders. On a more serious level, the German spy ring is shown as ruthless (the threat to Madeleine's life), and the head of the spies, Muller, is portrayed as harsh and severe. British espionage activities in Sweden are depicted as involving one officer, Bob, while the Germans have a network.

Von Marwitz's attitude to Madeleine is ambivalent: on the one hand we are left in no doubt that he is attracted to her and their love affair is shown as sincere on both sides; on the other hand, when ordered to do so, he puts duty before personal inclination and is prepared to take her off the neutral ship and presumably to hand her over to his colleagues for whatever fate they may have reserved for her. He still shows concern for her welfare, gently placing his coat around her shoulders as she sits in the open rowing boat. Von Marwitz is shown early on in the film as a philanderer, surrounded by young women who are not respectable (Madeleine's remark about 'girls of that sort'). Later he is partnered with a young woman who gets him to spend a lot of money on her which implies that she is 'a girl of that sort'. It is open to the viewer to read this as part of his cover as a deserter fond of the comforts of life; it also suggests an

association between Germans and immorality; a scene with Marwitz's manservant commenting on 'It used to be girls with no clothes...' implies that the Baron is a ladykiller.

However, Von Marwitz's spying activities can hardly be regarded as particularly reprehensible in a city where all the representatives of the various sides involved in the fighting are spying on one another. He is played by Conrad Veidt as a sympathetic character with considerable personal charm; his feelings for Madeleine appear to be sincere. Once he falls in love with her his previous philandering is put behind him, as his statement to Lupita indicates: despite Madeleine's absence he is not 'back in circulation'. In the conflict between love and duty, both he and Madeleine put duty first. While Madeleine's life is in danger from her erstwhile German colleagues, the film indicates that a German woman spy in Paris, caught with Madeleine's help, has faced a firing squad. Women are not exempt from the consequences of the risks they take and neither side shows clemency to women agents. Madeleine shows no resentment at her treatment, as her promise to wait for Von Marwitz shows.

There is little indication that the critics saw the film as anti-German; in general it was praised as a spy melodrama. *Monthly Film Bulletin* saw it as a 'vivid melodrama of secret service work in 1918', and sees the two protagonists as 'each [forming] a sincere admiration for the other, leading inevitably to a conflict of love and duty'<sup>470</sup>. *Today's Cinema* thought the film 'of intriguing and exciting incident, touched with romance, alive with electric war-time atmosphere, subtly suggestive of futility and cruelty of fights between human beings ...'<sup>471</sup>. This review went on to comment that 'the combatants are revealed without that frenzied bias and warped perspective deemed

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<sup>470</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.4, No.38, 1 February 1937, p.27.

<sup>471</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.48, No.3527, 1 February 1937, p.7.



necessary to the early war stories<sup>472</sup>. The reviewer saw no germanophobia in the film. *Picturegoer*<sup>473</sup> and *Kine Weekly*<sup>474</sup> were less enthusiastic, while still recommending the film as enjoyable. However, neither Graham Greene<sup>475</sup> nor the *New Statesman*<sup>476</sup> thought much of the film. The film must have been reasonably successful: it was 47 in Sedgwick's POPSTAT list for 1937<sup>477</sup> and was re-released in 1942<sup>478</sup>, 1943<sup>479</sup> and again in 1953 as *The Anxious Years*<sup>480</sup>.

Stars were an important part of the attraction for a film for British audiences of the time<sup>481</sup>. Conrad Veidt was popular with British audiences<sup>482</sup> and came to Britain with 'an outstanding reputation as a major actor in German cinema'<sup>483</sup>. In a detailed discussion of Veidt's career in British films, Sue Harper contrasts his portrayals in *I Was a Spy* (Victor Saville, 1933) and *Dark Journey*. In *I Was a Spy*, 'because of the controlled nature of his performance, his sexual yearning for the heroine seems coterminous with his zeal for honour'. Ultimately honour has to triumph<sup>484</sup>. The plot of *Dark Journey* is very similar: in that film, too, Veidt's character experiences a conflict between love and duty. However, Veidt's role in *Dark Journey* is less satisfying, because of the character's being an aristocrat and a womaniser, characteristics which Harper sees as 'alien to Veidt as an individual'<sup>485</sup>. Von Marwitz is shown as an aristocrat (the Von would suggest that to a British audience), and maybe

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<sup>472</sup> Ibid.

<sup>473</sup> *Picturegoer* Vol.7, No.327, 28 August 1937, p.24.

<sup>474</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1555, 4 February 1937, p.33.

<sup>475</sup> Graham Greene, *Spectator*, 2 April 1937.

<sup>476</sup> *New Statesman*, 28 March 1937.

<sup>477</sup> John Sedgwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, p.275.

<sup>478</sup> Review in *Today's Cinema*, Vol.58, No.4735, 12 June 1942, p.23.

<sup>479</sup> Review in *Today's Cinema*, Vol.61, No.4923, 31 August 1943, p.11.

<sup>480</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.80, No.6767, 28 May 1953, p.6.

<sup>481</sup> Sue Harper, "Thinking Forward and Up": The British Films of Conrad Veidt in Jeffrey Richards, ed, *The Unknown 1930s: An Alternative History of the British Cinema*, London, I.B. Tauris, 1998, pp.121-137, p.121.

<sup>482</sup> Sedgwick, 'Cinema-going Preferences in Britain in the 1930s', p.19, and see Harper, "Thinking Forward and Up": The British Films of Conrad Veidt, p. 122.

<sup>483</sup> Sue Harper, "Thinking Forward and Up": The British Films of Conrad Veidt, p.123.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid., p.127.

<sup>485</sup> Ibid., p.133.

rather an effete one at that. However, the womaniser who changes once he meets the 'right' woman is a popular figure in romantic fiction, and once Von Marwitz has fallen in love with Madeleine it is made clear that he stays faithful – even if he still enjoys the company of pretty girls. In the Conrad Veidt films discussed in this chapter, he played similar roles, that of a German officer in a First World War setting captivated by a woman who spies for the enemy: Veidt's character has to choose between love and duty, and chooses duty while trying to mitigate the consequences of her espionage for the woman concerned.

Robertson sees Hitchcock's British films of the 1930s as containing warnings about Germany, and puts forward strong arguments that the foreign power carrying on espionage activities against the British in some of the films represents Germany<sup>486</sup>. However the message is heavily disguised. In *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) the foreign power is unnamed. The message in *The 39 Steps* was rendered less clear because of the updating of the story from the period immediately prior to the First World War (the setting of Buchan's book), when the foreign power is Germany, to a contemporary one where, under the BBFC's rules, Germany could not be referred to explicitly. In *The Lady Vanishes*, the setting is clearly a Middle-European country, and the head of the opposition is Dr. Hartz of Prague (a German name, although not a German city, possibly a reference to the Sudetenland crisis which was building in 1938). The police and army endeavouring to catch the British spy and her friends could be seen as representing Nazis. They could also be any threatening foreign forces. The critics did not seem to connect the foreign spies with Germany: *Today's Cinema* refers to the action as beginning with 'an avalanche at a south European winter resort'<sup>487</sup>, which suggests that the reviewer located the action in

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<sup>486</sup> James Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.95.

<sup>487</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.51, No.3998, 24 August 1938, p.11.



France or Italy rather than Germany, perhaps focusing on the character of the Italian circus performer who features in the film.

Robertson argues that *The Secret Agent* (1936) is an 'overt anti-German feature', connecting this with Germany's re-occupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, a breach of the Versailles and Locarno treaties. He sees the neutral location as blurring the setting of the First World War, noting that there are few indications of that conflict. Thus 'the manoeuvrings between the British and German secret services might easily be taken as contemporary'<sup>488</sup>. I would argue the First World War imagery during the credit sequences firmly locates the film in the context of the stand-off on the Western Front .

The film contains anti-German elements: besides the depiction of the German spy as ruthless, even sadistic, there is an early sequence in the film which depicts a Zeppelin raid over London: it is a vivid reminder of the vulnerability of civilians to aerial attack, even more relevant to the then contemporary situation than 1916. However the film is not as anti-German as this implies.

Throughout the film the agent is apparently an American, and it is his American quality which is most memorable: until halfway through the film, when he is betrayed by the employee of the chocolate factory, the spy could be German or an American working for Germany. Even once he has been unmasked, the spy never loses his American accent or persona. When cornered by Ashenden and the General, he demonstrates considerable insouciance. Robert Marvin (played by Robert Young, an American star) is ruthless, even sadistic: he kills a church organist who is passing information to the British; he joins the German lesson Mrs. Caypor gives Elsa (Madeleine Carroll),

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<sup>488</sup> Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.95.

knowing that Ashenden and the General intend to kill Mr. Caypor, an innocent man, and apparently enjoying Elsa's discomfiture. The British are little better: they employ an apparently homicidal maniac and shameless woman-chaser, the General, for their assassination attempt; Caypor is killed on flimsy evidence – a lost button and the fact that his wife is German. The original ending of the film would have placed the British side in an even more invidious position, since it would have shown the General carrying out a 'logical, though brutal, liquidation of [the] spy'. Due to the censors' objection, this was changed to the spy shooting the Mexican, 'thus...atoning for his wrongful murder of Caypor'<sup>489</sup>. The British are redeemed by the fact that Ashenden and Elsa are appalled by what has happened and hand in their resignation as spies, while the actual killing is carried out by a foreigner, the General.

Mrs Caypor is the one overtly German character in the film, and is portrayed as a pleasant, kindly, elderly woman. The scenes showing her husband being led up a mountain by Ashenden and the General to his death are intercut with scenes of Mrs. Caypor giving a German lesson to Elsa (and later Marvin). Caypor's little dog becomes more and more distressed as his master nears his end and this concern communicates itself to Mrs. Caypor. This emphasises the wickedness of what is being done: a genial older man is murdered for nothing, his wife is left a lonely widow in a strange country (we are told she never lived outside Germany before the war), even the dog shows sorrow for its master. This is not the consequence-free elimination of a member of the opposing 'team' as Elsa's shocked reaction to the event shows.

The critic of *Kine Weekly* enjoyed the film: 'Espionage melodrama, lifted out of the rut to exciting entertainment of impeccable quality by the directorial genius of Alfred

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<sup>489</sup> Peter Noble, *Sight and Sound Supplement* No.18, 1 May 1949, pp.22 and 23.



Hitchcock...`, and also thought it `safe in its subject matter`, `conventional in its fundamentals` but `more artistic and subtle [in] the treatment`<sup>490</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* was less enthusiastic, summing up its view with: `There is much to be said for the technical quality and finish of this film; but the puzzling indeterminacy of outlook which pervades it makes it less than a completed whole`. The tempo of the film was seen as `abnormally slow`, and the plot-construction was found wanting<sup>491</sup>. *Picturegoer* complained of the `surfeit` of spy films, `the plot is never very convincing and the character lacking in sustained interest`. Peter Lorre`s performance as the General, which had been rather admired by the other critics was here dismissed: `The role is very incongruous and reminded me more of Harpo Marx than anything else`<sup>492</sup>. There is a strong element of comedy in these Hitchcock films, which tends to blur any message they may contain about the dangers of German rearmament. All were successful<sup>493</sup>, but it is impossible to know whether this was because the public enjoyed a good thriller or because they appreciated subliminal messages about German iniquity. The former seems more likely.

Even in the period following Munich Germans could be portrayed as honourable opponents. In the first collaboration between Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, *The Spy in Black* (1939), the eponymous spy was played by Conrad Veidt, by now established in the public mind as both German and Jewish<sup>494</sup>. Powell`s autobiography makes it clear that this film was designed as a star vehicle for Conrad Veidt, and was sold to the actor as a film about a man `completely devoted to his duty`<sup>495</sup>. The plot concerns a U-boat captain, Hardt, who is sent as a spy to a Scottish island to contact a

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<sup>490</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1517, 14 May 1936, p. 26.

<sup>491</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.3, No.29, 1 May 1936, p.83.

<sup>492</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.6, No.279, 26 September 1936, review by Lionel Collier, p.28.

<sup>493</sup> See Sue Harper, `A Lower Middle-Class Taste-Community in the 1930s`, pp.583, 584, and 587, and John Segwick, *Popular Filmgoing in 1930s Britain*, Appendix 3, pp., 269 and 272.

<sup>494</sup> Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, p.61.

<sup>495</sup> See Michael Powell, *A Life in Movies: An Autobiography*, London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1986, pp.305.

German agent, Fraulein Tiel (Valerie Hobson) who is posing as a schoolteacher. The Germans plan an attack on the British surface fleet; the British have discovered this and substituted a British agent for Fraulein Tiel.

In general the film depicts the action from Hardt's point of view. It begins in Kiel with Hardt and his second in command, Schuster, going for a meal (to discover that food is in short supply and there is no butter) and looking forward to some leave. Instead they are sent to the island of Hoy in the Orkneys, base of the British Grand Fleet. Later, the audience discovers the true identity of Fraulein Tiel and Lieutenant Ashington at the same time as Hardt does.

Hardt is portrayed throughout as a decent and honest man: he refuses to wear the disguise provided for him by his superiors, retaining his German naval uniform. He despises the British officer (Sebastian Shaw) who is apparently betraying his country's secrets (in fact Commander Blacklock, a naval officer posing as a traitor). He is attracted to Fraulein Tiel (who in fact is Mrs. Blacklock), and declares his admiration for her in the excitement of the moment when he thinks that the operation has been successful: 'I have served under many commanders, but none I admire as much as you': this from a man who earlier had been shown with Schuster laughing at the thought of his 'spouting poetry to a woman', the implication being that Hardt is not susceptible to women. For a moment it seems as though Mrs. Blacklock is attracted to him, she does not instantly rebuff him when he kisses her. However, she then pushes him away and rushes upstairs, forgetting in her haste to ensure that he is locked into his room. Hardt tricks her by pretending to shut his room door, while actually hiding outside to see what she does and discovers the truth about the British plot to trap German submarines; he escapes to try to warn his countrymen. With the help of some



German prisoners-of-war he takes over the ferryboat on which Mrs. Blacklock is travelling and threatens the passengers, although significantly no one is hurt. At the end of the film, after the ferry has been shelled by his ship and is sinking, Hardt is concerned to ensure that the passengers get safely off the ship, and orders the Germans to help with the lifeboats. Hardt's submarine is destroyed and he elects to go down with the ferry. The final shot of the film has Mrs. Blacklock watching this in tears. The only person alive on the ship is Hardt, her tears are for him

Hardt is shown as a likeable human being and other Germans are portrayed sympathetically, particularly Schuster who is fond of the girls and hero-worships his captain. There is a good, easy relationship between Hardt and his fellow officers, they are happy to share a laugh and a joke together. Such deceit as there is in the film is practised by the civilian women who kidnap the real schoolteacher, and ruthlessly throw her body into the sea (she is shown to survive). Here the usual masculine German stereotype is rather reversed: the men are decent and honest, it is the German women who are brutal. The British are also duplicitous. The machinations of the intelligence services on both sides result in the destruction of ordinary, decent seamen.

The film can be seen as having elements of an anti-war film. Throughout it is made clear that there is an equality of risk: the Germans plan to use their submarines to sink the British surface fleet; the British plan to lure the German submarine fleet into a trap and sink it. Mrs. Blacklock voices the film's underlying message that war kills every decent human feeling. In one scene, when the two confront each other on the ferry, Hardt says to her, 'You are English, I am German, we are enemies'. She responds, 'I like that better', to which he replies, 'So do I, it simplifies things'. The film thus

implies it is easier to be hostile to another than to try to deal with one another as honourable human beings each trying to do their duty in an impossible situation.

The critics on the whole admired the film. *Monthly Film Bulletin* thought Conrad Veidt 'brilliant in the lead. He is throughout a tragic if slightly sinister figure, and wins respect and sympathy as a patriot with the qualities most admirable and admired in soldier, sailor or airman of any nationality – loyalty, courage, obedience, and steadfast endurance'<sup>496</sup>. Cyril Connolly in the *New Statesman* also thought that Hardt was portrayed as an admirable character, while finding the film's ethics difficult to support: '...the effort to be fair to the Germans ... tied everybody up, and the audience, after hearing what good fellows the Germans are, has to applaud the sinking of a German submarine by a depth charge with all the good fellows on board'<sup>497</sup>. *Film Weekly* also admired the film<sup>498</sup>. *Today's Cinema* praised the film, seeing it as maintaining 'the balance of sympathy between Britain and Germany' and its 'grim climax' as a 'glorification of the U-boat commander who insisted upon retaining his uniform when ordered to spy'<sup>499</sup>. The film was re-issued in 1944<sup>500</sup>. By this time the British had experienced the Germans as a very dangerous and ruthless enemy for the second time, and Hardt's devotion to duty no doubt seemed rather less admirable. 'The film did very well at the box office, probably because of its topicality'<sup>501</sup>.

*Sons of the Sea* (1939, Maurice Elvey) is a film which was made, in colour, immediately before the outbreak of the war, and with the assistance of the Admiralty.

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<sup>496</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.6, No.63, 31 March 1939, p.41.

<sup>497</sup> *New Statesman*, 12 August 1939.

<sup>498</sup> *Film Weekly*, Vol.22, No.564, 5 August 1939, p.31.

<sup>499</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.LII, No. 4174, 22 March 1939, p.11.

<sup>500</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.62, No.5045, 14 June 1944.

<sup>501</sup> Sue Harper, 'Thinking Forward and Up', p.135.



It began shooting in July 1939, although was not shown until December of that year<sup>502</sup>; there is little apart from a couple of throwaway references to indicate that Germany and Britain are at war. One sequence, depicting secret information being taken out of Britain and sent to Germany, makes it clear that the enemy power is Germany – a character calls for the Ober (waiter), the German national anthem is heard on the soundtrack. It is possible that this sequence was added after the declaration of war. The film tells the story of a naval cadet, Philip Hyde (played by Simon Lack), the son of a naval Captain (Leslie Banks).

At the beginning of the film, the Captain of Dartmouth Naval College is murdered, and Captain Hyde takes over the job earlier than originally planned. The plot concerns a conspiracy (which Captain Hyde has discovered) by a foreign power to mine an important British fleet anchorage; the mines have been laid surreptitiously, and can be activated electrically at the outbreak of war. The film follows Hyde's confirmation of the presence of the mines, an attack on his boat by aircraft resulting in his being injured and losing his memory. Sub-plots concern suspicion that Philip has betrayed his father in some way, and a romance between Alison Devar (Kay Walsh) who lives nearby with her father, a foreigner long settled in Britain, and a naval officer, Lieutenant Strete (Peter Shaw). A German spy (Mackenzie Ward) masquerades as the brother of Margaret Hulls (Ellen Pollock), friend and housekeeper of the Devar family. Miss Hulls is depicted as absent-minded, and she has not seen her brother for many years, hence the deception is plausible. 'Newton Hulls' has been sent to prevent Captain Hyde from pursuing his investigation into the mine-laying plot, and is ready to commit murder to achieve his aim. A scene towards the end of the film indicates that the German spy, by then identified as Captain Müller, has murdered Hulls. Asked by a

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<sup>502</sup> Note in BFI pamphlet, *British Film Production During World War Two*, compiled by Jim Wilde, entry for *Sons of the Sea*, 2003.

Naval Intelligence officer how he came to have Hulls' papers identifying him as a member of Britain's Secret Service, Müller smoothly replies that the officer should 'use your naval intelligence'.

When first introduced, Hulls appears to be the perfect Englishman: pleasant, well-mannered, friendly. Alison Devar even refers at one point to his sense of humour. His claim to be a British secret service man allows him access to the naval college and its cadets. The only clues that he is not perhaps as 'pukka' as he seems is his wearing of an ostentatious white suit on his first appearance, and the Devar's dog growling at him. He makes a point of befriending Philip Hyde, and he flirts with Alison Devar, apparently genuinely attracted to her.

The depiction of the enemy power in the film is that of a ruthless and unscrupulous foe. Mines have been laid in English waters: given the date of filming and of the release of the film the implication is that this has occurred before the official outbreak of hostilities. The German spy network is shown as a spider's web, incorporating foreigners in England (the shipping agent in Liverpool with whom Hulls communicates is, his accent suggests, foreign), the waiter in Amsterdam and his German client, ending with the German espionage chiefs in the Fatherland. Hulls is willing to commit cold-blooded murder to achieve his aims; the aircraft attacks an unarmed Naval patrol boat in an effort to kill Captain Hyde.

However, Hulls is not without a sense of honour. Once captured, he makes a point of speaking to a senior British officer, informing him that Philip Hyde (still under suspicion of having betrayed information to Hulls) gave nothing away. It is clear that Hulls/Müller does this because he is aware that the cadet has been wrongfully accused



of betraying his father. Hulls describes Philip's 'loyalty, utter decency and frankness' and comments that he wishes he had a son like him. During this scene the German national anthem is playing on the sound track, again emphasising Hulls' nationality. Hulls states that he hopes someone will explain to 'the Admiral' - his nickname for Philip Hyde – 'that duty is the same thing in any language'. He thus shares some of the characteristics shown by Captain Hardt in *The Spy in Black*, although portrayed as a more ruthless and duplicitous person. Both have a sense of personal honour which means they endeavour to minimise the damage to those innocents who get involved in their activities. However, unlike Captain Hardt, Hulls/Müller appears throughout the film as a 'genuine Englishman'. The Naval Intelligence officer compliments him on his perfect English, wondering how he can speak without a trace of an accent: Müller nonchalantly replies: 'Sorry to be so uncommunicative but I'm sure you'll understand'. He preserves his perfect English mannerisms to his final appearance, the only tiny slip into a more German persona occurring when he makes his formal statement exonerating Philip: asked whether he will sign the statement he agrees with a slight click of the heels and a little bow. The German national anthem on the sound track may emphasise his foreign origin, but his behaviour and speech do not.

The critics appreciated the realism of the background and the topicality of the plot.

*Today's Cinema* considered the film 'excellent popular entertainment with topical title pull. A British film with background of the Royal Naval College, Dartmouth, is bound to exercise a special appeal in these momentous days. And the entertainment is British, too, in character...' <sup>503</sup>. *Daily Film Renter's* review was on similar lines. 'First-rate, popular entertainment, with stirring patriotic note'. However the patriotism was not overdone: '...the cast maintain a pleasing note of non-flag-wagging

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<sup>503</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.53, No.4336, 8 November 1939, p.11.

authenticity...Mackenzie Ward makes the spy an airy, nonchalant youth with plenty of nerve'. It, too, thought the film had 'unqualified popular appeal'<sup>504</sup>. *Kine Weekly* praised the same qualities, liking the 'topical, exciting and inspiring story...stirring patriotic pageantry...good humour, good spirits...' <sup>505</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* also approved of the film, seeing the story as 'plausible and extremely well acted...the theme is genuinely patriotic without being embarrassingly so' <sup>506</sup>.

The 1930s saw something of a resurgence for British film-making due to the protection afforded to the British film industry by the 1927 Cinematograph Act. A number of films were made which featured German characters in central roles, generally focused on stories set during the period of the First World War and films set during that period tended to show Germans as relatively honourable, although the association of the Germans with unrestricted submarine war (*Dark Journey*, *The Spy in Black*) drew attention to a German strategy which the British considered unacceptable. The German spy in *Sons of the Sea* was depicted as a ruthless murderer, even if one with a sense of honour. The popularity of many of these films suggests that British audiences were happy to watch films with sympathetic portrayals of Germans, provided other aspects of the film were appealing, implying that British antipathy towards the German people was not great. However they were not given any choice of exposure to strongly anti-German films (unless, as in the case of Hitchcock, the message was heavily disguised): the BBFC did not allow any direct criticism of the German Nazi government and its policies. *Jew Suss* was permitted in 1934 but its message is carefully placed within a historical context rather than being explicit. Even when a clear anti-German portrayal was allowed, as in *Secret Agent*, the message was diluted because of the morally dubious methods of the British spies; the implication was that espionage is a dirty game

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<sup>504</sup> *Daily Film Renter*, Vol.13, No.3885, 2 November 1939, p.6.

<sup>505</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1699, 9 November 1939, p.15.

<sup>506</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.6, No.71, 30 November 1939, p.202.



leading to unethical behaviour on both sides. Thus the British entered the Second World War with no clear cinematic conventions for the portrayal of the ignoble German and the refusal of the BBFC to allow criticism of Nazi policy and methods in British films meant that it was easy for the British to regard Germans as generally decent people, forced into tolerating the Hitler regime, and that it was the Nazis alone who were responsible for the evils occurring in Germany at the time.

## CHAPTER 4 - WARTIME BRITISH CINEMA

On the outbreak of war, the government closed all cinemas. Fear of bombing led to a desire to prevent people from coming together in large groups; however, this shut-down lasted only a short time<sup>507</sup>. Government was well aware of the influence of cinema<sup>508</sup> and its 'importance... in influencing mass public opinion and sustaining civilian morale'<sup>509</sup>. As early as 1935 plans had been made for the establishment of a Ministry of Information, and later for its involvement in film censorship<sup>510</sup>; MoI became responsible for security matters while the 'political and social content of feature films' was left to the BBFC<sup>511</sup>. Robertson concludes that feature films 'either had positive MoI approval or did not arouse sufficient official disapproval for any action to be taken in the direction of suppression'<sup>512</sup>. Propaganda was the responsibility of the Ministry of Information, and Churchill rarely interfered, although he was not above registering his opinion on occasions as the *Blimp* affair showed<sup>513</sup>.

As Ian McLaine remarked, 'In war it is almost axiomatic that the peoples of the combatant nations must be taught to hate each other', and Britain in the Second World War was no exception<sup>514</sup>. The British people initially seemed unwilling to hate their enemy, so the Ministry initiated an Anger Campaign, as I have discussed earlier. One

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<sup>507</sup> Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, eds, *Britain Can Take It: The British Cinema in the Second World War*, Second Edition, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1994, p.1. Michael Balcon, 'The British Film During the War' in R.K. Neilson Baxter, Roger Manvell and H.H. Wollenberg, eds, *The Penguin Film Review, 1946-1949*, London, Scolar Press, 1977, pp.66-73, p.66 describes the interruption as 'barely perceptible'.

<sup>508</sup> Fox, p.32.

<sup>509</sup> Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.109.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid., p.121.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid., p.122. For details of the pressures which could be brought to bear on filmmakers, see Vincent Porter, *On Cinema*, London, Pluto Press Ltd., 1985, p.109. As regards MoI effectiveness, see Philip M. Taylor, 'Introduction: Film, the Historian and the Second World War' in Philip M. Taylor, ed, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, pp.1-14.

<sup>513</sup> Chapman, *The British at War*, pp.83-85.

<sup>514</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II*, London.Allen & Unwin, 1979, p.137.



would expect therefore that in the early months of the war, films would draw a distinction between the German people as a whole and the Nazi party, while after Dunkirk this distinction would be ignored: up to a point this is what occurred.

The BBFC's attitude to anti-Nazi films changed at the outbreak of war, as was only to be expected. Robertson describes it as 'a complete reversal of policy over anti-Nazi films' from September 1939<sup>515</sup>, and during the latter part of that year a number of anti-Nazi scripts were approved, including *Pastor Hall* (Roy Boulting, 1940), which had first been presented to the BBFC in July 1939. It was derived from a play by Ernst Toller, reputedly based on the life of Martin Niemöller<sup>516</sup>. The script was finally passed by the BBFC in September 1939, after the outbreak of war. The film is anti-Nazi rather than anti-German, and depicts its eponymous hero (played by Wilfrid Lawson) moving from a position of tolerance and 'wait-and-see' at the beginning of the film to denunciation of the Nazi regime and all it stands for, resulting in his being shot by stormtroopers.

The opening credits of the film reveal its underlying oppositions, with a motif of a Christian cross superimposed upon a swastika. The written prologue of the film states that it 'is based upon authentic verified facts'. The opening shots of the church bell with its village name, Altdorf, and date of 1764, the sleepy deserted street and the congregation leaving the church, happily chatting to one another and Christine Hall (Nova Pilbeam), imply that nothing has changed for centuries and the church is the focus of village life.

The early scenes of the film show that Pastor Hall is a generous, kindly man (his gift of a chicken to Frau Kemp), averse to listening to the calumnies of the local gossip (Pippermann) and on very good terms with the other local authority figure, General von

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<sup>515</sup> Robertson, *The British Board of Film Censors*, p.124.

<sup>516</sup> Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, p.74

Grotjahn (Seymour Hicks), who is portrayed as the typical German army officer, with his large moustache, gruff (but kindly) manner, and his family history of military service. He is strongly opposed to the Nazis from the first. While the pastor shows a willingness to judge the stormtroopers by what he sees – the stories of their behaviour elsewhere may be exaggerated, such a major change in regime is bound to be unsettling – von Grotjahn has no doubts: the stormtroopers are ‘a lot of riff-raff in uniform’ who had ‘caused a lot of trouble in Berlin’; ‘don’t believe in being dictated to by a corporal – it’s bad for discipline’. The general has sources of information not available to the man-in-the-street: he has contacts at the Ministry in Berlin; a later scene indicates that he gets foreign newspapers (*The Times*) from a contact in Amsterdam in which is a report of the Night of the Long Knives, an event which has shocked him considerably: ‘Horrible, horrible, shooting your own comrades’. Christine is engaged to the General’s son, Werner.

The Nazi regime is characterised by Storm Troop Leader Gerte. At his first meeting with the Halls he spouts Nazi propaganda at Christine, expounding the Nazi ideal of *Kinder, Kirche und Küche* for women. Nazi ideology is discipline and crushing opposition: ‘Germany must be great and must be feared’. It is expressly linked to blind obedience to orders and the repression of the individual. He talks to the pastor of one doctrine, Nation and Fatherland, the superiority of the German race as decreed by the creator of the universe. Hall is prepared to temporise: he will ‘render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s...[and] in this village you appear to be Caesar’. However, when Gerte asks the whereabouts of ‘communists, socialists, pacifists, Jews, and enemies of the state’, Hall responds that he does not see the villagers in that light – they are not ‘enemies of the state’ and the only Jews are good people. Gerte’s chilling comment is that ‘National Socialism does not recognise good and bad Jews, only Jews’. The film



thus neatly albeit briefly draws attention to the wide range of people persecuted by the Nazis<sup>517</sup>.

We are then shown the effect of the presence of the stormtroopers on the village people. They watch from behind their curtains as the stormtroopers smash Maier's possessions because of his Jewish ancestry – Maier tells Hall they have 'learned to keep out of the way', and 'they couldn't do much anyway'. The new, Nazi, headmaster of the village school demands that Hall's scripture lessons are changed to interpret the Bible in a Nazi spirit, including avoiding references to the Old Testament and the Jews as the Chosen People. Frau Kemp's beloved son is killed during the Night of the Long Knives, and his ashes have to be buried secretly in defiance of the regime's orders.

Hall's Christian views are contrasted with the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. For Hall, National Socialism encourages 'a lust for power and fear', while for Gerte 'a man has only to obey to be happy', and 'unless you admit the right of a superior race' to better itself, there can be no common ground between them. The Pastor sees the difference between Gerte's creed and that of Christianity: God trusts his people with freedom, even if they use it unwisely.

What finally pushes Hall into overt opposition is the fate of Lina Veit, a fourteen-year-old village girl who is seduced and left pregnant during a visit to a labour camp. In despair at her situation, and shunned by the villagers, Lina kills herself, which the Pastor blames on National Socialism. He resolves to preach a sermon against Nazism, is arrested and sent to a concentration camp. His intentions are conveyed to Gerte by Pippermann: the new authority lends a willing ear to the local tale-bearer whose

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<sup>517</sup> Fox notes British reluctance to use the suffering of the Jews in anti-Nazi propaganda, see Fox, *Film Propaganda in Britain and Nazi Germany*, p.143, although several incidents in *Pastor Hall* emphasise the particular animosity directed against the Jews.

activities were ignored or frowned on by the previous authority figures of Pastor and General.

Scenes in the camp show Nazi brutality in a vivid way, given the constraints of censorship policy of the time: the prisoners are informed that they are worth only the price of a bullet; a man is deliberately enticed near the wire fence surrounding the camp by one of the guards in a watch-tower and casually shot – apparently as a warning to the others, and possibly as sport for the guard. An elderly man is sentenced to be flogged for quoting St. Paul – and the dialogue makes clear that this is likely to be a death sentence. A young Jewish man is taken off to be beaten up by the guards; the dialogue indicates this is for their entertainment. His screams are heard on the soundtrack. The prisoners are in the charge of a brutal criminal. Chapman notes that the emphasis on ‘the brutalisation of prisoners in the concentration camp is ...probably...due to the publication of a White Paper by the British government on the treatment of Nazi prisoners’<sup>518</sup>.

Gerte bargains with Christine – her father’s release for her sexual favours. His portrayal in this scene, flourishing a whip, is an encapsulation of the power he wields. Christine agrees, but Hall, told his release is conditional on not speaking out against the regime, proceeds to denounce: ‘this Hitler, architect of evil, creator of human misery’. He is sentence to be flogged, twenty-five lashes a day for an indefinite period – in effect a death sentence. The first flogging is shown, the pain inflicted on Hall being indicated by his hands writhing in the straps tying him down.

Hall’s escape from the camp is arranged by one of the guards, Degan, a former member of the Pastor’s congregation who cannot bear the thought of his being flogged again.

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<sup>518</sup> James Chapman, ‘Why we fight: *Pastor Hall* and *Thunder Rock*’ in Alan Burton, Tim O’Sullivan and Paul Wells, eds, *The Family Way: the Boulting Brothers and Postwar British Film Culture*, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 2000, pp. 81-96, p.84.



Taken to von Grotjahn's house, Hall realises that the day is Sunday. While Hall is in the pulpit (the new, Nazi pastor having been thrown out by von Grotjahn, who has given up his dislike of entering the church on this occasion), telling the villagers of the need to struggle against 'cruelty and wickedness', not to 'bear injustice silently', the stormtroopers are assembling outside, rifles at the ready. The film ends with Hall walking towards the church door, presumably to his death.

The distinction between Nazi and German is very clear. As James Robertson points out, the film emphasises Nazi brutality and inhumanity: the story of Lina 'equates Nazism with sexual immorality'; anti-Semitism is shown, as is violence to other Nazis (the slaughter of Röhm); there are the beatings and deaths in the concentration camp<sup>519</sup>. The corruption of the innocent, the moral of the Lina story, is also indicated by the young boys in Hitler Youth uniforms, and even the changes in the villagers. Nazi suppression of the individual, the elevation of the State above all things, and the need to instil in every individual the habit of obedience are shown. Criticism of the State and the Party is not permitted.

The Christian church and the old German establishment figures are shown as opposing Nazism. The reasons why the new ideology might be attractive are indicated: Degan becomes a stormtrooper because he wants a job, having been out of work for a long time. Nazi views are shown as attracting German patriots: Degan says that it is good to be working again for Germany. Lina Veit echoes this sentiment when explaining to the pastor why she wishes to go to a labour camp. The brief reference to communists and socialists indicates how the Nazis remove any form of organised opposition to their rule. The trashing of Maier's home and even more the horrors of the concentration

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<sup>519</sup> Robertson, *The Hidden Cinema*, p.76

camp show the pressures which the regime brings to bear on ordinary people. The change in attitude of the congregation, from friendly and generous people to sullen and suspicious is also indicated by the treatment of Hall and Christine and the watching of the stormtroopers at Maier's house from behind the curtains. Nazi encouragement of denunciations of neighbour by neighbour is embodied in Pippermann. Not all Nazis are irredeemably evil. Degan's behaviour at the concentration camp indicates that he has not fully absorbed the ideals of the new regime. The rapt attention the congregation gives Hall during his final sermon, and the way one man sheepishly covers his Nazi armband indicate that these people have not rejected all decent impulses. Even Gerte is given a human side initially: there is his awkward attempt to ingratiate himself with Christine by offering to help her with her gardening, an activity he clearly knows nothing about and at which he is almost endearingly clumsy.

The film was well-received by the critics. William Whitebait noted that 'it ought to have been made and shown in the careless pre-war days', while commenting that 'if it had been, the Censor would have doubtless banned it'. He praised its 'remarkable restraint', and the fact that it avoided 'trying to Germanise the actors'. For him 'it is the peculiar Englishness of the treatment which makes it so effective'<sup>520</sup>. *Documentary News Letter* was also favourable<sup>521</sup>. *Today's Cinema* thought it 'as valid and searching an indictment of Nazi doctrines as one could wish for', praising its revelation of Nazi 'crude bestiality', noting 'the teaching of pernicious doctrines' to children and 'the complete subjugation of the individual' to the State. The review commented on villagers' responses, seeing them as 'beset by fear, helpless onlookers ...'. Marius Goring's 'Stormtroop Leader Gerte is a triumph of venomous restraint'. The reviewer was aware of the 'propaganda value of *Pastor Hall*...but its success will be more

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<sup>520</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 1 June 1940.

<sup>521</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, Vol.1, No.6, 1 June 1940, p.9.



specifically due to the fact that it tells a story of suffering humanity in a way that cannot fail to be understood by any and every audience'<sup>522</sup>.

The film was the subject of a Mass-Observation survey following its showing at the Ministry of Information. The sample was very small, only 31 respondents, but of these, 23 thought that the film would 'increase determination to win the war among ordinary cinema audiences'. No one felt admiration for the Storm Troopers. 'An overwhelming number – 29 out of 31 – said that the film made them hate the Nazis', while six said it made them hate the German people. The overwhelming majority also felt the film drew an accurate picture of conditions in Germany. The group were divided about the merits of the film's going on general release. Seven thought it should not: 'brutality created brutality [M-O noted that 'criticism of individual sequences of the film centred mainly on the concentration camp scenes']; unconvincing as propaganda; creates feeling "it can't happen here"'. Those in favour of its showing felt differently: 'no pro-British propaganda; shows real Germany; will reveal German brutality; destroys feeling "it can't happen here"' <sup>523</sup>.

Despite the positive reviews of the critics and British government approval, the film was not a popular success<sup>524</sup>. The trade press considered people wanted entertainment not 'social problems'<sup>525</sup>. Robertson comments that the film 'makes it clear that Nazis rather than Germans are the enemy', and shows 'Germans did not have to be religiously motivated to loath Nazism, a courageous sentiment to put forward about an enemy nation at war'. The film's release as the phoney war turned into a shooting war was unfortunate as 'the image of good Germans...was not ... likely to appeal to British

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<sup>522</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.54, No.4418, 22 May 1940.

<sup>523</sup> Mass-Observation archive, File No. 162, 2 June 1940.

<sup>524</sup> James Chapman, 'Why we fight', p.87.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid*, p.84.

audiences'. However, it did help the British cause in the United States with a foreword on screen by Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt<sup>526</sup>. Chapman is less sure of its reception in America<sup>527</sup>.

This emphasis on German opposition to Hitler, and the distinction between Nazi and German, continued in Anthony Asquith's 1941 film, *Freedom Radio*, despite the change in approach suggested by the MoI. This film also depicts opposition to the Hitler regime<sup>528</sup>, but its portrayal bears resemblance to a resistance film in the story of a small, closely-knit, undercover group which tries to undermine Germany's rulers. Leader of the 'cell' is Doctor Karl Roder (Clive Brook), a medical specialist who happens to be Hitler's doctor. An Austrian married to a German actress and living in Berlin, he is introduced on his way out of the Führer's headquarters, in conversation with Rabenau (Raymond Huntley) – a Gestapo chief, who is scathing about Göring and Goebbels and then almost flirtatiously complains about Roder's marriage: 'What can a poor Prussian policeman do against your Austrian charm?' Roder's reply is facetious but with a hidden sting: 'Why not use your powers of arrest?' Subsequent scenes introduce Irene Roder (Diana Wynyard), a supporter of the Nazi regime, and her brother Otto (John Penrose). The latter is shown initially as an artistic boy, somewhat dismissive of Fascist display. Watching a Nazi parade with his sister he comments: 'I had to watch that sort of thing the whole time I was in Italy'. Irene reminds him he will now be part of this, and he comments he will feel rather silly, before finally admitting, 'I must say they do look good'.

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<sup>526</sup> James Robertson, *Hidden Cinema*, p.77.

<sup>527</sup> James Chapman, 'Why we fight', p.88.

<sup>528</sup> Clive Coultass sees it as reflecting 'the same kind of hopes for an internal resistance movement in Germany as *Pastor Hall*', attitudes left over from the Phoney War. See Clive Coultass, *Images for Battle: British Film and the Second World War, 1939-1945*, London, Associated University Presses, 1989, p.63.



Like *Pastor Hall*, the film traces Roder's growing disillusionment with the regime. Friends from his student days disappear, beginning with the Jewish Heini. When his club is finally closed by the regime, there are only four members present: Roder himself; Emil, the gloomy and politically conscious comedian; Rudolf, a successful businessman; Father Landbach, the cheery Roman Catholic priest. Karl comments: '...I don't think we can pretend any more'. Emil agrees: 'What good are meeting places for friends when you can't be sure who is your friend any more?'. At his watch service, an apparently nervous Landbach preaches to his congregation from the pulpit about the removal of a fellow priest. Gaining strength, he suggests that the latter was not an enemy of the Reich whatever the authorities may say. Stormtroopers enter the church, and in the ensuing *melée* Landbach is killed. As Karl goes to his friend he is ordered out by a stormtrooper; looking up he sees Otto.

Emil, Rudolf and Karl meet a young radio mechanic, Hans Glaser. A sequence shows Glaser's fiancée, Elly, and her grandmother. The latter is denounced by a sluttish neighbour for listening to a foreign broadcast and is arrested by the Gestapo. When Elly returns, the officer in the flat rapes her. Hans calls Roder for help, and Karl and Irene both come. Irene supports Elly in making an official complaint, which is rejected, upon which Elly threatens to 'scream it in the streets'. The hysterical girl is apparently treated sympathetically; once Irene's back is turned, however, she is sent to a concentration camp.

Their political differences drive Karl and Irene apart. A montage sequence shows Karl walking the streets, interspersed and overlaid with shots of marching armies, Kristallnacht and stormtroopers. Then the camera cuts to a loudspeaker broadcasting a speech about the wrongs of German countrymen outside the borders of the Reich – a

reference to the Sudeten Germans, presumably. This is Karl's 'Road to Damascus' moment.

With the help of Emil, Rudolf and Hans, a pirate radio station is set up to tell the German people the truth, not the regime's propaganda lies. The film traces the Gestapo tracking of the station, led by Rabenau, and the deception practised by the broadcasters. The finale shows Karl and Irene reconciled – she finally realises that the regime is intent on war and accompanies Karl on his last broadcast when he warns the German people: 'You've been told the democracies will not fight', but they will. He also accuses the Germans: 'You cannot avoid responsibility by blaming it on your leaders...you gave this man his power'. If they fail to act to stop Hitler's plans they will incur 'the loathing of posterity'. The broadcast is interrupted by the arrival of the Gestapo, who call on Karl to stop. He continues: 'Unless you act now, your chance has gone forever...rise up for freedom'. The back of the ambulance is riddled with bullets, and Karl is killed. Irene takes up the microphone: 'Did you hear? That was the death of a brave man. He died for freedom and for Germany. But though some have died, others will take their place'. She too is shot, while Otto desperately begs that this should stop. When the doors of the ambulance from which the two were broadcasting are opened, Otto turns his face away. A smug Gestapo officer informs listeners that this was 'the last broadcast of the so-called Freedom Station': Hans, who is in a boat with a second transmitter, cuts in informing the audience that they will be on air as usual the following night.

The film reflects many of the attitudes discernible in *Pastor Hall*. There is the association of opposition to the regime with organised Christianity in the persons of Father Landbach and Karl, who is clearly a believer. The German military are not



shown as necessarily allied to the Nazi cause. One of Roder's friends, a stereotype of Prussian militarism with his duelling scars and his home in East Prussia, is in on the plot. The fate of Heini foregrounds, as *Pastor Hall* does, the anti-Semitic nature of Nazi ideology (while ignoring, as *Pastor Hall* does not, the Nazi oppression of socialists and communists). Unlike *Pastor Hall*, where opposition is firmly centred in the conservative, Establishment figures of General von Grotjahn and the pastor, the existence of opposition in other social classes is acknowledged: Hans is a working man, Maria a small shopkeeper, Emil an entertainer and a member of the intelligentsia, as is Karl; Rudolf a successful businessman; there is even a member of the Gestapo, Dressler, in the organisation's ranks. *Pastor Hall* concentrates on opposition to the regime by individuals: *Freedom Radio* shows more of a collective response, although one directed by a person of social rank, Roder.

Both films acknowledge the prevalence under the Nazis of low-level informants, Pippermann in *Pastor Hall*, and Frau Lehmann in *Freedom Radio*. Both link the Nazis with physical violence (the concentration camp scenes in *Pastor Hall*, the scenes in Landbach's church, the shooting of Dressler in cold blood, and the later killing of Irene and Karl in *Freedom Radio*), and thus emphasise the costs of opposing the regime. Both link Nazis with sexual licence: the treatment of Lina in *Pastor Hall* and Gerte's blackmailing of Christine for her favours; the rape of Elly in *Freedom Radio*.

Although more obviously an entertainment film than *Pastor Hall*, *Freedom Radio* nevertheless contains many of the same messages contained in the earlier film. The case against the Nazis and their ideology is powerfully put, both through the dialogue exchanges between Karl, Irene and Otto, but also through the incidents portrayed (the detention of Heini, Landbach's death, Elly's treatment, the deception of the German people). There is a strong message concerning State propaganda, with its motif of the constant bellowing voice on the radio (the scene in Granny's flat, Roder's walk through

the streets). The German people, it suggests, are deceived, deprived of honest information and reliant on Goebbels' lies. However Roder's final broadcast suggests that this will not absolve the Germans from their support for Hitler. Roder's Austrian nationality is emphasised, thus giving the honour of instigating the opposition to a non-German, even though all his comrades are Germans. Rudolf is allowed to voice the opinion that the Germans like giving and obeying orders. Thus the film can be seen as a less sympathetic portrayal than *Pastor Hall*.

One unusual feature of the film is the character of Rabenau. He is not shown as a thug, he even has a certain sinister charm. The opening scene with Roder indicates an ability to laugh at his own expense. He is urbane, cultured, at home in the same *milieu* as Karl and Irene; there is a hint of a romantic attachment to Irene. He is less than enthusiastic about Göring and Goebbels, suggesting a rivalry at the top of the Party. In the party scene at which he hears the Freedom Station's first broadcast, he distances himself from the sexual horseplay around him, implicitly agreeing with Rudolf that such things are not to his taste. He is, however, a ruthless man, a ruthlessness made all the more chilling because of the absence of straightforward brutality. He is courtesy and concern personified when dealing with Elly, while intending to send her to a concentration camp; he shoots Dressler apparently without anger or compunction.

*The Times* review was quite complimentary about *Freedom Radio*, seeing it as 'another film to have modern Germany as its background, but it is neither repetitive nor imitative'. The reviewer went on to note the film's showing of a husband and wife unable to live with their political differences, but that 'in Nazi Germany such difference must soon go deeper, for ways of life, not academic political theories, are involved'. The performances were praised, while 'Mr. Raymond Huntley and Mr. John Penrose



make typical and significant props of the Nazi edifice<sup>529</sup>. As noted above, I would argue that Raymond Huntley's performance is not 'typical', but the reviewer's comments indicate that that was how it was seen at the time. William Whitebait also liked the film, including it among 'several good films about the Nazis [which] have appeared in recent weeks', and regarding them as '(comparatively) fair to the enemy...comparing them with the sort of thing provided ... during the last war'. He also thought that '*Freedom Radio* has some authentic touches of the Nazi new way...[and] the Nazi types...distinguished with some subtlety'<sup>530</sup>. Louis Macneice was less enthusiastic. He saw the film as a tribute to the 'underground opposition in the dictator countries'. However he criticised (inter alia) 'the uniform Englishness of its cast. The typical Englishman...is not cut out to be a Gauleiter'. In contrast to Whitebait who, in his review of *Pastor Hall*, considered that the 'Englishness of the treatment' made the portrayals 'more effective', Macneice did not feel that the Englishness of the depiction added to its effect, perhaps a subconscious rejection of the idea that an Englishman could ever behave like a Nazi. He also criticised the propaganda elements of the film, seeing this 'vitiating by the too simple, but incredible assumption that, while the Nazi leaders are crooks and nothing more, the Nazi rank and file are more fools who, like Otto in this picture, quickly become transformed into mere brutes'. He concluded: 'if a really great picture ... is to be produced on such a theme, we need more psychological subtlety and depth, a more imaginative grasp of the Nazi world which we ourselves – however indirectly - helped to create; it is a fantastic and horrible world, but it is not outside nature'<sup>531</sup>. *Today's Cinema* saw the film as 'political melodrama', but noted that 'present trend of war events puts theme rather out-of-date'. The reviewer saw the 'citation of Gestapo brutality' as 'melodramatically

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<sup>529</sup> *The Times*, 27 January 1941.

<sup>530</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 1 February 1941.

<sup>531</sup> Louis Macneice, *Spectator*, 31 January 1941.

satisfying', again using the word 'bestiality' to describe the rape of Elly<sup>532</sup>. *Kine Weekly* also liked the film calling it 'spectacular, suspenseful political adventure melodrama', and praising the mixture of fact and fiction in the details<sup>533</sup>.

The film was not a commercial success; like *Pastor Hall*, it can be seen to have been released too late for its themes to have any relevance. By January 1941, Britain had experienced the surrender of her French ally, the scrambled evacuation from Dunkirk and the horrors of the Blitz. Sympathy for the Germans was in short supply and films dealing with conditions in Germany in the pre-war period no doubt considered an irrelevance, however much they might reveal about Nazi brutality. Films about Nazi behaviour in occupied countries provided more attractive vehicles for discussing the oppressive and violent nature of Nazi ideology.

Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger made two wartime films dealing with the German character. Both starred Anton Walbrook as the 'good' German. *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* (1941) was a propaganda film directed at the USA, and was supported by the Treasury through the Ministry of Information<sup>534</sup>. It generally followed the Ministry's propaganda agenda, but Aldgate notes that the film in one respect contradicted the shift in British propaganda in 1940 'to the belief that "Nazism is but the latest and most virulent manifestation of the inherent wickedness of the German race"'<sup>535</sup>. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1942) became famous as the film Churchill tried to ban<sup>536</sup>. Both films were commercially successful, *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* winning an Academy Award in 1942 for Emeric Pressburger's screenplay, and the MoI and the Treasury

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<sup>532</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.56, No.4518, 15 January 1941, p.10.

<sup>533</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1761, 16 January 1941, p.20.

<sup>534</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.29. For a full discussion, see pp.21-43.

<sup>535</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.41.

<sup>536</sup> For a detailed discussion of this subject, see James Chapman, 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) reconsidered' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio & Television*, Vol. 15, No.1, March 1995, <http://libezproxy.open.ac.uk/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=950520775&site=ehost-live&scope=site> accessed 30 April 2008.



making a profit from it. Aldgate suggests that the view of Germans taken in the film accorded well with those of the British public<sup>537</sup>.

*49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* contrasts representatives of Nazi Germany, in the persons of six survivors from a U-boat crew<sup>538</sup> trying to escape from Canada into the then neutral USA, with citizens of a democracy. Powell stated that each of the Germans was intended to typify 'a certain aspect of Nazi teaching or personality'<sup>539</sup>. The initial contact between the group and a remote Hudson's Bay Company post demonstrates this: Jahner (Basil Appleby) is the epitome of violence as his hitting of the Eskimo youth demonstrates; Kunecke (Raymond Lovell) is the Old Comrade, a practical man, able to repair the radio; Hirth (Eric Portman) is the ideologue, spouting Nazi racist ideology to Johnny about the Eskimo. Nazism is his religion and *Mein Kampf* his Bible. He tells the factor that he is not a Christian. Lohrmann (John Chandos) and Kranz (Peter Moore) are followers, loyally obeying Hirth's orders (until, in Lohrmann's case, he thinks he will fare better without his superior officer). Vogel (Niall MacGinnis) is a more complex character: apparently a loyal hanger-on, he shows a different side when he sidles in, after Hirth's departure, to give the dying Johnny his rosary, a kindly gesture which he follows with knocking a picture of the King and Queen from the wall and scrawling a swastika in its place.

A conversation between the factor and Johnny emphasises German brutality, the flattening of Warsaw and the machine-gunning of women and children, stories which Johnny initially doubts – mirroring those in Britain and elsewhere who doubted information about Nazi atrocities. The film has already established the Germans as

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<sup>537</sup> Ibid., Section on *Colonel Blimp*'s audiences. For *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, see Aldgate and Richards, p.40.

<sup>538</sup> Making the Germans members of a U-boat crew was both logical in relation to the plot, explaining how they came to be in Canada in the first place, and constituted an extra 'turn of the screw' for the British audience, who seem to have felt a particular antipathy to German U-boat activity. Evans states that: 'We all knew of the merciless sinkings of unarmed merchant vessels and the privations and tortures of seamen, adrift for weeks sometimes, in open boats. The sheer cold-bloodedness of the battle on the seas was frightening...', Evans, Chapter 12, p.7.

<sup>539</sup> Powell, p.351.

brutal in the opening scenes of their actions towards the crew of the merchantman they sank. During their escape from the post, the crew shoot at the Eskimo people who live there, the camera lingering on a dead woman and child.

The survivors of the crew find themselves at a Hutterite community where they are invited to stay as guests. Here Vogel begins to express remorse to Hirth about their actions; Hirth is dismissive, quoting Bismarck: 'We will leave them only their eyes to weep with', a reference to continuity between Wilhelmine and Nazi Germany. Vogel is happy in the community, able to practice his civilian trade as a baker and impressed with the democratic nature of the Hutterites. Hirth is convinced that all Germans are one, and at a meeting in the community meeting-house, he preaches Nazi ideology to the people, talking of 'a great wind...rising in the East' (an oblique reference perhaps to the Huns) and praising Hitler as 'the greatest [man] in all human history', inviting the company to pay 'homage to our glorious Führer – Heil Hitler'. Vogel listens with his head down. Peter (Anton Walbrook), the Hutterite leader, responds, rejecting the concept of all Germans as one: 'We are not your brothers...Our children are free to grow up as children without being forced to march up and down the streets singing battle songs ... You and your Hitlerism are like the microbes of some filthy disease...you destroy everything healthy in the world' (a similar comment is made by Roder in *Freedom Radio*), a nice turning of Nazi propaganda on itself, as the Nazis often compared Jewish people to a disease.

After Anna has confronted Hirth, accusing the Nazis of killing her father and drowning her mother (presumably in a U-boat attack), she is taken back to Peter's house by Vogel, against Hirth's express order. There, Vogel states that he likes the community, it reminds him of life at home before the Nazis came. When Peter asks how a 'simple, decent human being' like him can get mixed up with 'such a lot of gangsters', Vogel tries to explain: boys like playing soldiers; for young men it is the only way to get on;



the old men are frightened of what they might lose – the emphasis is on a masculine Nazi stereotype. Peter invites Vogel to stay with the community; although this will mean internment until the end of the war. Vogel delightedly accepts and is up early next morning to bake bread and make a beautifully decorated cake for Anna's birthday. His happiness is shortlived. His companions take him away and sentence him to death 'in the name of the Führer'. Vogel says nothing, but glances up into the sky – God's sun, perhaps we are meant to deduce, not the false dawn of Nazism.

This section of the film can be seen as an argument about how far the German people as a whole are responsible for the crimes of the Nazi regime, whether there is a difference between Nazis and Germans. The existence of the Hutterites, German by birth but peaceful and co-operative by culture, is a rejection of the concept of all Germans being alike. The character of Vogel shows there is hope of reforming those Germans who have acquiesced in Nazi policies and provides an explanation how ordinary people can be led to support a cruel and repressive regime. In the right environment, Vogel is a sociable man, proud of his craft, kindly and chivalrous to Anna. His death emphasises the price of defiance.

The remainder of the film shows the capture of the rest of the party. It includes a confrontation between an apparently effete democrat, Philip Armstrong Scott (Leslie Howard) and Hirth and Lohrmann. Scott is a scholar, studying Indian culture, and living in a teepee with paintings and books. He rescues the two Nazis, who are lost in the wilderness. His anti-Nazi leanings are revealed when he compares Germany under Hitler to the Blackfoot tribe which trained its boys in the arts of war, shot its enemies in the back, terrorised its neighbours, and when their leaders wanted to make a point they used constant repetition: 'Old Man Hitler himself'. The Germans overpower him, destroy his paintings and books, and escape. Lohrmann knocks Hirth out and continues alone, to be caught by Scott who gives him a thrashing for Picasso, Matisse and

Thomas Mann, proving that 'one unarmed Englishman' is a match for an armed *übermensch*. The film ends with an army deserter (Raymond Massey) squaring up to fight a bewildered Hirth who has been turned back at the border by US customs officials who see no reason to help a Nazi escape.

The critics generally liked the film. *The Times* singled out Eric Portman's performance as 'the fanatical German officer'; he 'plays him abominably well, never letting our instinctive sympathy with the game quarry get out of hand'<sup>540</sup>. *Today's Cinema* was equally enthusiastic. It appreciated the depiction of 'the brutality of the Germans to the harmless Esquimaux...in keeping with the Nazi standards of warfare. Worship of the Führer is stressed by the unthinking docility of the sailors when confronted by any form of authority, and their stupid assumption that every German feels the same...'; the introduction of humour 'extremely effective in its application to the ritual and obsessions of the servants of the Reich' was appreciated<sup>541</sup>. Both William Whitebait and *Documentary News Letter* expressed concern that the audience's natural instinct was to sympathise with the escapers while appreciating that the way the Nazis and their brutal behaviour were portrayed would negate such sympathy<sup>542</sup>.

Churchill's objection to *Colonel Blimp* should be placed in context. When Pressburger was writing the original screenplay in 1942, 'the state of public morale was in decline, and it was further depressed by events that occurred in the first weeks of the month [February]: the escape of the *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* to Germany from Brest, the surrender of Singapore, and a debate in the House of Commons discussing the survival of 'Blimpery' in the British Army'<sup>543</sup>. It was the Blimpery shown in the film that was criticised rather than the sympathetic portrayal of a German.

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<sup>540</sup> *The Times*, 9 October, 1941.

<sup>541</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.57, No.4632, 10 October 1941, pp.129-130.

<sup>542</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 18 October 1941 and *Documentary News Letter* quoted in Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.40.

<sup>543</sup> Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards, *Best of British: Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present*, New Edition, London, I.B. Tauris, 1999, p.80.



Bracken at the MoI pointed out he had no powers to ban the film, and the fact there were rumours of attempts to ban it provided good publicity<sup>544</sup>.

*Colonel Blimp* features an honourable German character, Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorf, again played by Anton Walbrook. While in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* Peter simply exists, we have no biography for him, the character of Theo is fleshed out through three episodes in the life of Clive Candy (Roger Livesey), the 'Colonel Blimp' of the title. Their first encounter is in 1902 during the Boer War when Clive visits Berlin at the invitation of Edith (Deborah Kerr) in an attempt to counteract anti-British propaganda. In a confrontation with Kaunitz, a man he met in South Africa and whom he despises, he insults the German Army and is challenged to a duel. His opponent is to be Theo. Much fun is had playing on a German stereotype in the arrangements for the duel; it is all highly ritualised, formal and choreographed, and accomplished with many bows and heel-clicks. The same applies to the actual duel itself. There is, perhaps, an implication that the Germans are preoccupied with the outward show of honour rather than being sensitive as to what is truly honourable, as their association with Kaunitz indicates.

Both Clive and Theo are injured in the duel and make friends while they are both convalescing in the same nursing home. The friendship is not spoiled by Theo's winning the hand of Edith, whom Clive loves.

The action moves to the First World War. Here we see Clive mildly interrogating German prisoners, with no success. Once he has gone, a South African, Major Van Zijl, continues with threats and soon obtains the information required. On hearing of the Armistice, Clive feels it proves his contention that 'right is might'. The Germans may have shelled hospitals, bombed open towns, sunk neutral ships and used poison

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<sup>544</sup> Quoted in James Chapman, '*The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) revisited', section on Nicholas Pronay and Jeremy Croft.

gas, but `...we won. Good honest soldiering won`. Clive appears oblivious of what has gone on around him, for example the British used poison gas.

When Clive tries to visit Theo at a prisoner-of-war camp, the latter refuses to speak to him. Clive's wife voices her view of the Germans: `How odd they are – queer. For years and years they're writing beautiful music. Then they start a war, sinking undefended ships, bombing towns, killing women and children. Then they sit down in that same butcher's uniform and listen to beautiful music`. For her there is `something horrible about that`.

Good relations are restored after the war, when Theo contacts Clive on his way back to Germany. At a dinner at Clive's house, where some of the representatives of the Establishment are assembled, Theo is assured that Britain needs to build Germany up as a trading partner. Among his comrades, Theo shows a cynical side, seeing in British willingness to aid Germany an opportunity. Perhaps the audience is being led to believe he will be a willing convert to Nazism later.

The final section of the film deals with current wartime events. At an Aliens Tribunal, Theo reveals why he has come to England: although an anti-Nazi, he initially thought he had nothing to fear from Hitler. His wife is dead, his sons are good Nazis `if any Nazi can be called good` and he became homesick for England, his wife's country. Clive vouches for him.

Clive has learned nothing, he still thinks `good honest soldiering` can beat Hitler. Theo has learned from the past: `This is not a gentleman's war. This time you are fighting for your very existence against the most devilish idea ever created by a human brain – Nazism. And if you lose, there won't be a return match next year, perhaps not for a hundred years...`; there will be `no methods but Nazi methods`. The film ends with Clive, defeated by the unBlimpish soldier, Spud, deciding to ask Spud to dinner.



The critics were divided about the film. Some enjoyed it while noting the hero's lack of similarity to Low's Blimp<sup>545</sup>. C.A. Lejeune thought the message unclear<sup>546</sup>, although seeing 'its standard is remarkably high. From a craftsman's point of view, it is a crisp, clean, workmanlike job'<sup>547</sup>. *Documentary News Letter* saw Clive as 'an apologia for the upper-class specialists who misguided this country into the mud of Munich and the disasters of 1939-1940'. It commented of Theo: 'it is the Prussian who reneges on the Nazis, while the financiers, soldiers, diplomats, etc., as we well remember - carried on the good work of backing up Hitler'<sup>548</sup>. The trade press was more complimentary. *Kine Weekly* described it as '...outstanding general booking, the biggest box-office certainty of this century'<sup>549</sup>. *Today's Cinema* was just as effusive: '...this latest production of the Archers is the most significant that has emerged to date from any British studio'. It noted Theo's 'stirring indictment of what Nazidom can do to a father and his family'<sup>550</sup>.

Chapman reports that 'by far the most hostile reaction to *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, however, came from...the right-wing sociologists E.W. and M.M. Robson, who made a vitriolic attack on the film in a pamphlet entitled *The Shame and Disgrace of Colonel Blimp* (1944)'. They 'believed that the Germans were basically an aggressive race who were bent on conquering the world, and that even in defeat they would plan the next attempt'. They particularly objected to Theo as a 'good' German, 'for the Robsons there was no such thing'<sup>551</sup>.

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<sup>545</sup> Paul Trench, *Evening Standard*, 18 June 1943 and Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 17 September 1943.

<sup>546</sup> See also *Manchester Guardian*, 1943 (undated further on BFI microfiche).

<sup>547</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 13 June 1943.

<sup>548</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, No.5, 1 August 1943, p.219.

<sup>549</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No. 1886, 10 June 1943, p.13.

<sup>550</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.60, No.4888, 9 June 1943, p.12.

<sup>551</sup> Chapman, 'The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp (1943) reconsidered', section on *Colonel Blimp* and the critics. See also James Agate, *Tatler and Bystander*, 16 June 1943: '...German cavalry officers do not rat ... which is just what constitutes the danger of German militarism'.

All these four films, *Pastor Hall*, *Freedom Radio*, *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* and *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp*, directly challenge the idea that all Germans are aggressive, brutal monsters. Each shows Germans who are appalled by the direction which their country has taken and who react against this, either by personal opposition to the regime from within the country (*Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio*), or who leave or are forced to leave (Anna, Peter in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, Theo in *Colonel Blimp*). Those who support the Nazi regime, either actively or passively, are not necessarily irredeemable (Degan in *Pastor Hall*, Irene in *Freedom Radio*, Vogel in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*). The pressures and impulses encouraging people to participate in Nazi activities are indicated: Degan joins the stormtroopers to find a job; Lina Veit goes to a work-camp for patriotic reasons. Irene believes in the Nazi project and accepts the Nazi propaganda picture of how things are. Vogel explains the various temptations and pressures the regime can bring to bear on a 'simple, decent human being'. However, former Nazi supporters are shown to pay for their mistake by being killed. Christian values, it is suggested, provide an antidote to Nazi influence (this view is not put forward in *Colonel Blimp*).

However, it is important not to exaggerate the degree of sympathy shown to the German people in these films. Both *Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio* depict opposition to the Nazi regime within Germany. However, *Pastor Hall* is set in 1934, in the early days of the *Hitlerzeit*, and the impression given by the film is that direct opposition to the government is restricted to a small and select circle. The majority of the villagers of Altdorf are shown as willing supporters or cowed into submission, even if they show respect for their Pastor in the final scene. *Freedom Radio*, made later during the war, ends with a condemnation of the German people for failing to act – perhaps reflecting British disappointment at there not being an attempt to overthrow Hitler when war broke out. Neither film was commercially successful. Both *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* and *Colonel*



*Blimp* were successful at the box-office, and this could be taken as indicating that British audiences had no strong objection to films featuring 'good' Germans, although perhaps preferring 'good' Germans who are not actually in Germany. While both 49<sup>th</sup> *Parallel* and *Colonel Blimp* acknowledge the existence of 'good' Germans, it would be easy to take from the films the message that these have all left Germany, although the character of Vogel does indicate that some of those who remain are not happy with their situation.

Even from the very first days of the war, the great majority of British films showed a stereotypical and antipathetic image of Germans to their audiences. The first to come out after the outbreak of hostilities was Alexander Korda's propaganda piece, *The Lion Has Wings*. It was put together hastily, Aldgate states that the film took 'five or six weeks, from start to finish'<sup>552</sup>. Korda had been in contact with the RAF just before the outbreak of war, and had 'received permission to produce a film for the RAF'<sup>553</sup>. In his detailed examination of the film Short notes that it was part of 'the British Air Ministry's use of the cinema as part of a multimedia strategy to project the propaganda of British air power to a national and worldwide audience'<sup>554</sup>, and Korda and his team received considerable assistance from the Ministry<sup>555</sup>.

There was a need for uplifting propaganda detailing the RAF's preparations to repel German air attack. Stanley Baldwin had warned in 1932 that 'the bomber will always get through'<sup>556</sup>; Korda's film *Things to Come* (1936) had given a vivid picture of a

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<sup>552</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.23. K.R.M. Short suggests that the film took slightly longer at eight weeks: K.R.M. Short, *Screening the Propaganda of British Air Power: From R.A.F. (1935) To The Lion Has Wings (1939)*, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 1997, p.ix.

<sup>553</sup> Short, p.7.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid., p.ix.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid., pp.20-21.

<sup>556</sup> Quoted in Short, p.1.

country ravaged by bombing; there had been newsreel footage of Guernica<sup>557</sup>. The public was alarmed at the possibility of massive enemy bombing attacks with resulting 'enormous civilian casualties'<sup>558</sup>

Richards considers that *The Lion Has Wings* 'established the images of the two sides for the duration by contrasting the goodnatured, decent, hardworking democratic British, with their sense of humour and their love of sport, and the regimented, fanatical, jackbooted Nazis, marching in faceless formations'<sup>559</sup>. Robert Murphy agrees, seeing the 'barbarian' Germans threatening the British Empire as they had once the Roman<sup>560</sup>, thus implicitly linking the film with Vansittart's views.

A combination of newsreel and actuality footage, reconstructions of actual events and fictitious scenes, the film opens with extremely stereotypical depictions of the two sides. Britain is first shown as a rural country, then its cities are depicted in terms of how these are being modernised, in explicit contrast with Germany in the commentary: 'Is it to stop because one man tries to impose his **outmoded** [my emphasis] ideas upon others?'. Further shots of British modernisation follow with the commentary emphasising that Hitler is trying to destroy all this. The German people are then shown: 'Others preferred to march', against an insistent drum-beat on the soundtrack and footage of goose-stepping, uniformed Germans in a military parade, then Hitler himself followed by armoured vehicles and guns. The emphasis both in the pictorial depiction and the commentary is on Britain as unmilitaristic (all the British shown are civilians) and Germany as a nation in arms. The camera frequently dwells on British individuals (children in a hospital, a man and a small girl doing the 'Boomps-a-daisy',

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<sup>557</sup> Anthony Aldgate, quoted in Short, p.10.

<sup>558</sup> Short, p.x.

<sup>559</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Best of British*, pp.57-58.

<sup>560</sup> Murphy, p.17.



a man rowing). Germans are shown as a mass: at a Nuremberg Rally for example, the only individual to be discerned is Hitler himself. The film can make fun of the enemy: bleating on the soundtrack of the Rally; a Hitler speech intercut with scenes of bookies at the Derby. While the commentary has taken the Chamberlain line and emphasised the evil influence of 'one man' trying to destroy 'life as we know it', the depiction of the massed ranks of uniformed Germans at Nazi rallies and parades tends to blur the distinction between leader and people.

The film goes on to recount the run-up to the war, starting with Hitler's assumption of power in 1933. The commentary implies that the Locarno Treaty dealt with all outstanding issues from Versailles and therefore all Hitler's subsequent actions are unwarranted aggression. Sarcasm is employed: Hitler gives his word 'in his honourable, open fashion' and then promptly breaks it. Later footage uses quotations from *Mein Kampf* to indicate that Hitler's and Germany's aggression is part of a planned strategy, not provoked in any way. The wrongdoing starts with the march into the Rhineland in 1936. At this point we are given the only footage of German civilians (including some women) as the commentary suggests that this might have 'sown seeds of doubt' in the minds of Hitler's own people; the face of one individual man is also shown. The only other individual German faces shown are soldiers, one playing a trombone in a military band in footage of the occupation of the Sudetenland, and soldiers waving from a truck in footage of the incursion into Memel – thus linking the individuals with Nazi aggression. Later footage concerning the invasion of Poland refers to German brutality through shots of newsvendors' headlines: Polish peasants and refugees machine-gunned; Americans torpedoed in the *Athenia*; 'frightfulness' in Poland.

When the film moves on to the RAF, emphasis is placed on British bombers being 'not for defenceless towns, not to break the morale of the civilian population, but for military and naval objectives'<sup>561</sup>. In the reconstruction of the Kiel Raid which follows, there is again reference to Britain's avoidance of civilian targets: the pilots are informed about a hospital relatively close to the target which cannot be mistaken for anything else – the implication being that it must be avoided; and the commentary refers to the target being 'a fortified naval base bristling with guns'.

Finally the film looks at British air defences. For security reasons the RAF would not allow any mention of RDF [radar]<sup>562</sup> but the film neatly suggests that prior warning of a raid would be received through a short sequence of a spy passing information on. German orders for the raid are shown: in contrast to the quiet efficiency of the British chain of command shown in the reconstruction of the Kiel Raid, German orders are barked down the telephone from Berlin. At the pilots' briefing, instead of the informal friendly atmosphere of the RAF, the Germans are brusquely given orders while standing rigidly to attention, another reference to their militaristic attitude perhaps<sup>563</sup>. The raid is easily foiled by the splendid interaction of the Observer Corps, the RAF's fighters, the AA batteries and barrage balloons; the Germans head for home. This is in contrast to the ease with which the British bombers were depicted carrying out a daylight raid over the Kiel Canal.

The film thus fulfils two propaganda objectives: it establishes that the British cause is just, war has been forced on 'us' by German aggression; the Germans have been preparing for war for some time. Reassuringly the film demonstrates that the RAF is

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<sup>561</sup> Quoted in Short, p.63.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>563</sup> Fox quotes J.B. Priestley on this point, Fox, p. 67.



prepared to defend Britain against any German bomber threat and is properly equipped to do so.

The image of the Germans in the film is, as has already been pointed out, that of a nation in arms, militaristic, completely under the sway of a brutal and irrational dictator. It is a very masculine image – only one shot of women is shown. German society is depicted as a mass – rarely are individual faces singled out, most of the shots show large, anonymous, uniformed crowds. Korda implicitly associates the First World War imagery of the German soldier (which is linked thereby to Prussian militarism) with Nazism<sup>564</sup>; Britain is not fighting a new enemy, just a new manifestation of the old. Even after the end of the war, there is evidence that the Allies linked the two<sup>565</sup>, to the disadvantage of the Prussian military caste, which suggests that the British failed to notice or ignored the extreme racist nature of Nazi ideology. The commentary contains faint hints that the Germans are misguided rather than wicked: ‘... a leader whom they worshipped as a god... gave them the choice of guns or butter, and he **made** [my emphasis] them choose the guns’<sup>566</sup>, or the sound of bleating over footage of the crowds at the Nazi rally. The shot of German civilians against the reference to the march into the Rhineland also suggests that some Germans might harbour doubts about their leader’s policies.

When the German bombers turn back from their mission the pilot specifically says he will drop the bombs over the sea, not just dump them over land, implying the need to avoid hitting a civilian target. The film thus implies that the Germans will ‘play the game’ and stick to the rules as the British do. Underlying the British stress on not

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<sup>564</sup> See Fox, pp. 65-66.

<sup>565</sup> See MacDonogh, p.347.

<sup>566</sup> This suggestion of Hitler being worshipped is echoed in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* in Hirth’s description of *Mein Kampf* as his Bible, and the language he uses to the Hutterites.

attacking undefended towns is the assumption that bombing can be accurately targeted, which was not the case. It can be argued that there was an unforeseen propaganda effect of Korda's (and other) film. If it led to the public's believing that bombing could be accurately targeted and civilian targets could therefore be avoided, it would cause people to think that when the Germans hit civilians, they must have intended to do so, even if those civilian areas hit were in the vicinity of a legitimate military target. Later in the war any pretence of attacking only military targets was abandoned by both sides<sup>567</sup>.

In some respects the film's propaganda aims lead to contradictions. The need to assert the rightness of Britain's cause, the way she has been forced into war results in the early section of the film contrasting the peaceful British with the warlike Germans. Later, the requirement to demonstrate the strength of the RAF means that the reconstruction of the Kiel Raid makes the bombing of German battleships appear ludicrously easy, while Britain's air defences win an unconvincingly simple victory against Nazi bombers. In the former the Germans are a dangerous enemy, and in the latter a rather ineffective foe.

The film was very successful. 'It topped attendance charts when it opened in November, and went on to become the second-highest grossing film of the year'<sup>568</sup>.

The Air Ministry and the MoI 'lent public support to the film', and the king and queen went to see it<sup>569</sup>; 'aware that the film was propaganda, and recognizing its flaws, critics and public alike saw it as a laudable patriotic gesture and were consequently

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<sup>567</sup> Short, p.24 reference Britain.

<sup>568</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *British War Films, 1939-1945: The Cinema and the Services*, London, Hambledon, 2001, p.32.

<sup>569</sup> For details of the type of publicity undertaken to promote the film, see Jeffrey Richards and Dorothy Sheridan, eds, *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1987, pp.325-326, and Fox, pp.70-71.



supportive<sup>570</sup>. *The Times* review praised the film as 'emphatically an instrument of war', and referred to the 'ominous thunder of marching feet' and 'regimented herds of Nazis' (perhaps an allusion to the sheep). 'The simpler arts of derision are ...most effectively used, against Hitler...on the whole it is stirring and good-humoured propaganda'<sup>571</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* also expressed its approval: 'The opening, with its gravely gay cross cutting – the voice of Hitler contrasted with the bleatings of sheep and the barking of bookmakers – sets the tone for the whole, and the film is never allowed to degenerate into false sentimentalism or uncomfortable flag-flapping'. The reviewer concluded that 'it admirably fulfils its object – to inspire quiet confidence in the hearts of those who see it'<sup>572</sup>.

Not all reviewers were so enthusiastic. The *New Statesman* remarked: 'it does seem questionable whether the balloons will cause such surprise and consternation amongst the raiders as the film suggests'. Some aspects were noteworthy: 'its tracing of pre-war history is, though brief, quiet and humorous, and effective as far as it goes; the air defence pictures should be most encouraging to civil morale, and the Kiel Canal raid is both inspiring and touching'. However, 'the effectiveness of the film would of course be greater if it gave a less misty explanation of the purposes for which the Lion has Wings'<sup>573</sup>.

The film may have been a success at the box-office but it was not admired by all its viewers. A Mass-Observation survey indicates that the public response was ambivalent. While a majority liked the film there was a sizeable minority who disliked

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<sup>570</sup> Mackenzie, *British War Films*, p.31. See also, *Mass-Observation at the Movies*, p.324.

<sup>571</sup> *The Times*, 31 October 1939.

<sup>572</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol,6, No.71, 1 November 1939, p.201.

<sup>573</sup> *New Statesman*, 4 November 1939.

it (12.7%) or were doubtful about it (14.5%)<sup>574</sup>. ‘The largest criticisms were of the propaganda element in the film’<sup>575</sup>, seen by some as unBritish<sup>576</sup>. The propaganda element was cited as a reason for not having seen the film<sup>577</sup>, although there was a suggestion from one respondent (F 60 D) that maybe one should see a propaganda film: ‘I know it was propaganda but I didn’t go’<sup>578</sup>. Fox notes that the film was not a propaganda success abroad<sup>579</sup>.

One or two respondents from this small sample objected to the portrayal of Germans in the film. One man did not like ‘the portrayal of the Germans as swarthy villains’ (M50B) and M30B considered ‘it rather underestimated Germany’<sup>580</sup>. Aldgate quotes the *Documentary News Letter*: ‘Puerile it is that all the successes should be on our side, that the Nazi pilots are cowardly morons...that the Nazi air command is ignorant of the balloon barrage’ and points out that ‘Tom Harrisson came to the conclusion that “it was a powerful contribution towards Chamberlainish complacency”’<sup>581</sup>. Thus while the film achieved its propaganda aims for some, its playing down of the enemy threat made it unconvincing for others. It set out clearly two stereotypes of the opposing sides, and depicted the Germans as united (however doubtfully) behind their Nazi leader, providing a stark contrast to Chamberlain’s statement distinguishing between the Nazis and the German people as a whole<sup>582</sup>.

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<sup>574</sup> Richards and Sheridan, p.312.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., p.318, F20B and M20B.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., p.319.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid., p.322,

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> Fox, pp. 73-74.

<sup>580</sup> Richards and Sheridan., p.319. For other comments of a similar nature, see pp.318 and 322.

<sup>581</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.23.

<sup>582</sup> Quoted in Osley, p. 19.



This same mixture of fact and fiction<sup>583</sup> is used in *For Freedom* (May, 1940) directed by Maurice Elvey and Castleton Knight. It celebrates the first British naval success of the war in the sinking of the *Graf Spee* in the River Plate in December 1939. (As Coultass notes, during the Phoney War, 'at sea ... there was no lack of incident'<sup>584</sup>). Once again the run-up to the war is rehearsed, then elements of the battle are staged using the personnel who actually took part in the event. Newsreel footage is used, and the story of the naval engagement is placed within the context of the fictional setting of a newsreel production studio.

The film opens with a newsreel editor, Ferguson (Will Fyffe), preparing a film explaining the outbreak of war, *Shadow over Europe*, narrated by E.V.H. Emmett (who commentated on *The Lion Has Wings*). This uses the same stereotypes as the earlier film but dates the roots of German aggression prior to the First World War by commencing with very old-fashioned rural scenes. The First World War is blamed on the Prussians for their violation of Belgian neutrality. Attention is drawn to the German Navy's scuttling of its fleet after the surrender (a reference to the fate of the *Graf Spee*). Ferguson's offscreen comments are heard, all drawing attention to the failure to deal with Germany in 1918.

The interwar period is then examined. The rise of Hitler is traced, with the comment that the Nazis had no majority in the German Parliament and never did have under free elections; they are accused of cheating to obtain power. Hitler's broken promises to the working man are alluded to, they got 'precious little bread' but did get 'circuses' (against a shot of a Nazi rally). The imprisonment of opponents in concentration camps

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<sup>583</sup> As James Chapman notes, *The British at War*, p.181.

<sup>584</sup> Coultass, p.23.

is mentioned. Ferguson comments `... that a week after Hitler came to power Britain was at Geneva discussing disarmament`.

The film explicitly links Nazi Germany with Prussian militarism. There is a comment that `the old bullying Prussianism was on the march again...this time founded on showmanship` against a shot of a torchlit procession, the beating of a drum and the waving of flags. Some fun is had in a sequence where footage of Goebbels has a spoof voice for the Propaganda Minister on the soundtrack making it appear that Goebbels is advertising Hitler and the Nuremberg Rally as though he were a showman puffing his product. The voiceover comments, `Hitler Youth strut and swagger, the old, old Prussian maxim that might is right`, against a shot of the Kaiser's son. The film also traces the history of Nazi Germany's attacks on smaller nations.

Following Chamberlain's success at Munich, Ferguson's son, Stephen (Anthony Hulme), discusses making a film about human achievement. This gives the opportunity to introduce a meeting of correspondents from other countries. Fritz (Albert Lieven) sees the new film as an opportunity to `help people to understand my country, the new Germany`, at which Ivan (Arthur Goulet) laughs and Fritz takes umbrage. Sam (Hugh McDermott) remarks that `it takes a Russian to laugh at anything in Germany`. Later in this sequence Fritz claims that `...my Führer only wants peace, he has said so many times`. This leads to a discussion between Sam and Fritz about *Mein Kampf*, which Sam has read (unlike Fritz). For Sam, the book is proof that Hitler likes war; Fritz responds that Hitler only wants to unite the German people – at which point the news comes of the Nazi march on Prague.



Another meeting of correspondents takes place in August 1939, with discussion of footage of a Russian military parade. Fritz states that 'I believe what every German thinks – we'll have nothing to do with blood-stained criminals'. Germany will never join with Russia – it would be a signal for war. When the news arrives of the Russian-German agreement, Fritz is puzzled, 'I don't understand it'. Ivan points out, 'We are strange bedfellows, but if Stalin has decided...', and Fritz agrees, 'If my Führer has willed it...'; he thinks Britain will now not fight. Ferguson disagrees.

The countdown to war begins: American citizens book passages home, British people leave Germany, refugees begin to move, the British Ambassador gives a final warning to Germany about Poland. The film then shows the first shots of the war. At a German-Polish border crossing, the Poles are shown peacefully going about their business, while on the German side soldiers stand concealed, guns trained on the Poles, awaiting a signal. When this is given the Poles are gunned down in cold blood, and a newsman calls Ferguson from Poland to tell him the Germans are on the move.

Ferguson has a final word with Fritz. 'Well, Fritz, it's war, that's a certainty. Germany and Britain at war again'. Fritz replies: 'I regret that we can't be one big family. I am German – you are British. We are enemies'. The impression given is this is a permanent state of affairs, and Fritz leaves, having not shaken Ferguson's proffered hand. Sam, sent back to the States, has a passage booked on the *Athenia* which, the commentary points out, was sunk on the first day of war, 'women and children struggling in the sea', the 'typical German method of submarine warfare'.

With the help of Captain Dove, the film shows the sinking of the *Graf Spee*. Dove's capture by the Germans is reconstructed, including their coming aboard and his protest

that he was in territorial waters. He is taken to the *Graf Spee* to make the protest in person. Throughout this scene, the Germans are shown to behave courteously and correctly, after the initial deception (they approach flying the French flag). Dove even offers the German officer a drink, which is accepted. The crew are put into the boats before the *Africa Shell* is sunk. Relations between Dove and the Germans are businesslike and quite friendly. Later Vice-Admiral J.E.T. Harper, brought in to discuss the battle, admits that the captured crews on the *Graf Spee* were on the whole well-fed and well-treated, unlike their counterparts on the *Altmark*.

The events of the battle itself are shown, with references to the situation on the *Altmark*, whose captain threatens the British seamen with being marched through the streets of Hamburg to show the people the achievements of the *Graf Spee*: 'England will not win', a speech greeted with a chorus of 'raspberries' from the captives. When the scuttling of the *Graf Spee* is shown Harper's commentary refers to her 'ignominious end'; in all the years of the Royal Navy's history no ship has ever scuttled itself, a suggestion of German cowardice. The film ends with the release of the prisoners from the *Altmark* and Churchill's speech to a banquet for the crews, ending with the words of the rescuing officer from the *Cossack*, 'The Navy is here'.

The film repeats the message of *The Lion Has Wings*: Germans are inherently aggressive; Nazism is a continuation of the attitudes of Prussianism (emphasised in the later film); whatever may happen, Britain will win. Germans fight 'dirty', careless of the lives of non-combatants. They are devoted to their leader and will follow him whatever happens (even if, as in Fritz's case, they find his twists and turns puzzling). There is also a suggestion that the Russians and Germans are similar, an acceptable



viewpoint at a time when the two dictatorships were allied and had just carved up Poland between them.

The critics liked the film: *Monthly Film Bulletin* thought it 'spectacular naval drama ...magnificent, inspiring and thrilling spectacle...' <sup>585</sup>. *Motion Picture Herald* noted that: 'Shown to a trade audience at the Cambridge, London, the screening had an atmosphere of a religious rite with cheers for the men and even more for Churchill...' <sup>586</sup>. *Today's Cinema* also admired the film 'Subject of immense world-wide appeal and interest magnificently recounted in succession of actual political events, vividly contrasting peace aims of Britain with Nazi power lust and exposing for all time treachery of German leaders...a box-office certainty'. Also praised was the depiction of the countdown to war, noting the 'invasion of helpless neutrals, the making and breaking of glib promises...above all, the German militaristic creed'. The reviewer seemed to accept the association of Prussian militarism with the Nazi Party and noted the 'saucing' of 'stiff and starchy German naval officers' <sup>587</sup>, contrasting the free and easy British with the German stereotype. While *Documentary News Letter* praised the film, it also point out defects, considering that 'it is perhaps a little less than fair to Captain Langsdorff and his men' <sup>588</sup>. *Kine Weekly* also liked the film: 'Grand naval spectacle, ingenious story frame, good cast, great propaganda, inspiring documentary, terrific real life drama, shrewd timing, compelling subject matter, and box-office title', noting the performances, including that of Albert Lieven as Fritz <sup>589</sup>. The *New Statesman* also approved the 'considerable improvement on *The Lion Has Wings*',

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<sup>585</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.7, No.76, 1 April 1940, p.54.

<sup>586</sup> *Motion Picture Herald*, Vol.139, No.11, 11 May 1940, p.52.

<sup>587</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol. 54, No. 4403, 17 April 1940, p.11.

<sup>588</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, Vol.1, No.5, 1 May 1940, p.6. Clive Coultass comments that Langsdorff's use of the naval salute and his suicide while wrapped in the Imperial German flag was commented on at the time, Coultass, p.25.

<sup>589</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1722, 18 April 1940, p.22.

praising 'its restraint, its sound statement of the British case, an excellent if simple speech on internationalism, and its lack of Blimpish dialogue'<sup>590</sup>.

James Chapman notes that the film 'did quite well at the box-office in the summer of 1940'<sup>591</sup>. S.P. Mackenzie agrees: 'it performed well at the box-office, tying for the top moneymaker spot in May 1940'<sup>592</sup>. He points out that the sinking of the *Graf Spee* and the rescue of the seamen on the *Altmark* were 'rays of sunshine amid depressing reports of mounting British shipping losses'<sup>593</sup>. There is evidence to suggest that while the audiences enjoyed the final section of the film dealing with the *Graf Spee* and the *Altmark*, 'the first part of the film, which was not publicized, was often a disappointment', which is unsurprising since it reprises the opening section of *The Lion Has Wings*<sup>594</sup>.

Given the central danger to the British war effort represented by the U-boat campaign, it is unsurprising that the British navy's response was depicted in wartime films.

*Convoy* (Pen Tennyson, 1940) is the fictional account of the passage of a convoy across the North Sea. During the opening credits the help of the Royal Navy, Merchant Marine and the Admiralty is acknowledged. The 'cheerful co-operation' of the men of these services made the filming possible.

The film combines showing the activities of a Royal Naval convoy escort with a melodramatic tale of an eternal triangle between Captain Armitage of *HMS Apollo* (Clive Brook), one of his lieutenants, Cranford (John Clements), and Mrs. Armitage

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<sup>590</sup> *New Statesman*, 20 April 1940.

<sup>591</sup> James Chapman, *The British at War*, p.181.

<sup>592</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *British War Films*, p.66.

<sup>593</sup> *Ibid.*, p.64.

<sup>594</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.



(Judy Campbell), and the complications that ensue when the presence of Mrs. Armitage on one of the convoy's ships, *Sea Flower*, is revealed.

The first appearance of Germans in the film is when four prisoners are marched off the ship through the crew's messdeck, just as the grog ration is being issued. One of the British crew stops the party and offers the prisoners some: 'It's the last they'll see for some time. Poor bastards'. The escort complains, fraternisation between men and prisoners is forbidden; a prisoner protests that such conduct is 'Verboten'. However, the grog is handed over, and three of the prisoners gladly drink it, muttering their thanks. They are told, 'You made a mistake letting those Nazis kid yer'. The protester knocks the cup to the ground, then gives a Nazi salute, 'Heil Hitler'. The distinction between the ordinary German, with whom friendly relations can be established once he is got away from his Nazi-dominated countrymen, and the fanatical Nazi is thus preserved. So is the idea that the Nazis deceived the German people.

The character of Captain Eckersley of *Sea Flower* is established in a later scene. He is independent minded, refusing to join the convoy, and has anti-Nazi credentials: he ran the Spanish blockade. Most of his passengers are Jewish refugees (although, as the mate points out, they have paid for their passage). Nevertheless, Eckersley is proud to have saved them from being 'herded together in some Nazi concentration camp'.

The duplicity of the Germans is now demonstrated. *Sea Flower* is stopped by a U-boat and asked to identify itself. Eckersley claims to be Spanish and the U-boat captain permits the ship to continue its voyage, apparently accepting the claim of neutrality. Eckersley is very dismissive, 'A child could fool a bunch of square-heads'. However, U37 knows *Sea Flower* is British: she is allowed to proceed as part of a plan to attack

the British convoy, and two other U-boats are signalled. Later *Sea Flower* is captured by the Germans who begin broadcasting an SOS message to divert ships from the convoy. *Apollo* receives the SOS informing her that Lucy and her maid are aboard. Cranford, in direct defiance of orders, sends a destroyer and a plane to assist. The destroyer is recalled but the plane cannot be.

The German plan is then revealed: U40 and 42 are waiting to attack the convoy as soon as its defences are weakened by the detachment of a destroyer, and their crews are delighted when the plan appears to be working. The recall of the destroyer sees the U-boats submerge. The attack, it seems, has now been called off. Meanwhile the plane is shot down by the Germans on *Sea Flower*, the U-boat captain refusing to try to pick up survivors on the grounds the plane's crew are dead. When Eckersley and Lucy protest about drowning women and children, the German dismisses this as irrelevant: if what he does saves Germany that is all that matters; Hitler approves and 'no greater man than Hitler ever existed'. Lucy and Eckersley respond by quoting Nelson's prayer before Trafalgar, where he speaks of ferocity during the battle and humanity to all after. U37's captain responds: 'We Germans think only as our Führer has told us, with our blood', which suggests both the sway Hitler and his ideas have over his people and that Germans have some mystical link, all part of one tainted whole.

As destroyers from a North Sea patrol approach (having picked up the distress signal) the full horror of the German plan is revealed. U37 will sink *Sea Flower*, which does not have enough boats for all the passengers, the German captain informing a protesting Eckersley he should not carry more passengers than his boats can accommodate. While the destroyers stop to pick up survivors, the U-boat will have a chance to sink them. As a final sadistic gesture, the German orders that the hatches



over the hold where the refugees are sheltering should be battened down – they will have no chance of escape. He returns to his submarine and prepares to torpedo *Sea Flower* while Lucy and Eckersley rush to open the hatches and release the refugees. However, U37 is shelled by the destroyers as it submerges and then depth-charged. The occupants of *Sea Flower* cheer as this is happening but when there is a loud explosion (in case its significance is missed by the viewers, the film shows the interior of the U-boat with water pouring in) they fall silent, perhaps a mark of respect for the dead despite how *Sea Flower*'s passengers and crew were treated.

Later Eckersley and his mate come across *Deutschland*, heading for the convoy. Eckersley tries to communicate to the convoy by the only means he has, Morse code on his ship's siren. He and the mate are killed when *Deutschland* silences them. The captain of the German battleship is shown as rather more traditional than U37's: he salutes *Sea Flower* as she goes down, before commenting that 'that was good work'. He then goes after the convoy while *Deutschland über Alles* is heard on the soundtrack.

In a fight between the outgunned *Apollo* and *Deutschland*, *Apollo*'s courage in attacking despite major damage provokes a compliment from the German, 'they are hard, these British...'. However, German indifference to human life is also indicated. The captain of *Deutschland* prepares to sink *Apollo* but will not stop to pick up survivors because he wants to attack the convoy. When he hears that British battleships are approaching, he runs away: 'This is no place for us. Cease fire and go home'. This suggests German cowardice in the face of equal or superior opposition, in sharp contrast to the bravery of the crew on *Apollo*. The film ends with the convoy's safe arrival at its destination, and a service on board the ship where the losses suffered to bring the convoy safe home are mourned.

*Kine Weekly* showed considerable enthusiasm, 'a film with the Nelson as well as the showman touch'<sup>595</sup>. *Today's Cinema* agreed, appreciating the film's depiction of the 'dangers faced and the hazards overcome' by the Royal Navy in escorting convoys, seeing the film as essentially factual: 'It is the sort of thing we know the Navy to be doing every day – taking helpless little ships under its protection, sinking cowardly submarines...even a lone destroyer engaging a lordly German battleship...'<sup>596</sup>. This writer seems to distinguish between the German surface fleet, which is seen as (up to a point) a fair opponent, and the U-boat fleet whose activities are regarded as underhand. It is perhaps no coincidence that the German surface fleet was heavily outnumbered by the Royal Navy: the risk to British shipping lanes was primarily from U-boats. *Motion Picture Herald* noted its enthusiastic reception in London<sup>597</sup>.

Critics in the rest of the Press also enjoyed *Convoy*, but with some reservations.

William Whitebait thought it 'vivid, well-documented, with spectacular battle-piece in which the *Deutschland* is all but sent to the bottom. Both as entertainment and as propaganda for the least publicised part of our naval effort, it is a success from the word go'. However, he felt that 'Convoy would have been twice as good if fiction had been kept out'<sup>598</sup>. Basil Wright concurred<sup>599</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* praised the film, while obliquely criticising the love interest, concluding: 'This film can ... justifiably claim to be the most exciting, lifelike and restrained account of the Navy's work in wartime yet seen on the screen'<sup>600</sup>. *The Times*' critic also deplored the inclusion of 'the woman' and rather damned the film with faint praise, regarding it as having 'generally

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<sup>595</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1730, 13 June 1940, p.14.

<sup>596</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.54, No.4427, 12 June 1940, p.19.

<sup>597</sup> *Motion Picture Herald*, Vol.139, No.13, 29 June 1940, p.32.

<sup>598</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 13 July 1940.

<sup>599</sup> Basil Wright, *Spectator*, 12 July 1940.

<sup>600</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.7, No.78, 1 July 1940, p.87.



manage[d] to stay on the right side of sentimentality and heroics', concluding '*Convoy* has some substantial merits to set against its lack of the austerer virtues'<sup>601</sup>. While praising the film (with the general dislike of the love interest), *Documentary News Letter* criticised it for its portrayal of Germans:

Unfortunately the Germans of the film are conventional automata, punctuating their sadisms with heel-clicking.... It is a pity that we do not take advantage ... of the opportunity to represent the Nazis as inhabitants of this planet and therefore eligible to be subjected to human standards of criticism. The public can only be bewildered and depressed by the contemplation of the enemy in the guise of ersatz men of Mars<sup>602</sup>.

Richards notes that it was 'the top British box office success of 1940'<sup>603</sup>. Chapman comments that the public liked the 'unabashed patriotism' of *Convoy*<sup>604</sup>. There is no evidence that the audience were 'bewildered and depressed' at the portrayal of Germans in the film; its popularity would suggest that they accepted such a depiction without any misgivings.

This portrayal of the Germans as deceitful and indifferent to the safety of non-combatants is reflected in the documentary-style film, *Western Approaches* (Pat Jackson, 1944). Again the audience is shown scenes in a U-boat as it preys on merchant shipping in the Atlantic. The film was in colour, unusual at the time for a documentary film. It concerns a convoy being escorted across the Atlantic by the Royal Navy from New York to London. Another plot strand deals with a boat of

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<sup>601</sup> *The Times*, 8 July 1940.

<sup>602</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, Vol.1, No.8, 1 August 1940, p.9.

<sup>603</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.336.

<sup>604</sup> Chapman, *The British at War*, p.180.

merchant seamen whose ship has been sunk in the middle of the Atlantic and who are trying to make the coast of Ireland.

As Aldgate details<sup>605</sup>, the film had a long gestation period; although plans for a film about the convoy system were in discussion as early as the end of 1941, it took until late 1944 for the film to reach the screen, by which time the end of the war was in sight and the danger to Britain's supply line across the Atlantic, which had been acute, was virtually at an end: after 1942 '...U-boats continued to achieve isolated sinkings in all theatres but there was no longer any hope...of breaking the supply chain from the USA'<sup>606</sup>. Although the film received considerable publicity when it went on general release in January 1945, it was understood that it was no longer as topical as it had been at its inception<sup>607</sup>.

The opening sequences of the film stress its factual credentials, with official help being acknowledged and reference made to the players being serving officers of the Allied and Merchant Navies. Then the miseries of life in an open boat are depicted: its occupants discuss how, as the men were abandoning ship, the U-boat which torpedoed them surfaced and opened fire, killing some of the crew. The machine-gunner is 'a dirty skunk'. Such behaviour is not in the sea-going traditions of always helping to save fellow mariners.

A number of scenes deal with the preparation for the sailing of a convoy from New York, introducing the captain and crew of *Leander*. A briefing is shown and the vital rules of 'convoy etiquette' explained; failure to observe these may put the whole

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<sup>605</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, pp. 246-269.

<sup>606</sup> I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot, eds, *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.845.

<sup>607</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.268.



convoy in danger. In particular captains are reminded that for a U-boat commander the moment of attack is a worrying one; the more the convoy ships fight back, the greater chance that the Germans will sheer off – as in *Convoy* a hint that the Germans are bullies who will not risk their own safety. US help is acknowledged, America will provide air cover for the first part of the journey.

On the lifeboat the captain has heard the noise of diesel engines. He thinks that this is a U-boat charging its batteries. This U-boat would be a danger to them, so the officers throw away any sign of rank. The captain warns his men that the U-boat will not pick them up nor risk their being able to give its position away; the implication is that it will sink the open boat and leave the crew to drown. That the danger is serious is emphasised when an injured member of the crew, delirious, begins yelling and has to be knocked out to keep him quiet.

After further scenes on the convoy, the audience is shown the interior of a submarine with the captain at the periscope, a red-bearded, blond-haired, heavily-built man. He sees the lifeboat. The situation for the men on board is perilous: the injured man is getting worse and is still delirious; 'Sparks' keeps sending radio signals but the batteries are getting low. Back in the U-boat the radio operator picks up the SOS signal. On checking their relative positions, the captain realises that the boat above is the sender. He inspects the lifeboat through his periscope and decides to use it as a decoy to catch whatever ship may come to its rescue. The signal is picked up by *Leander* which alters course to pick up the survivors.

The film now cuts between scenes on *Leander* (unsuspectingly sailing into an ambush), on the lifeboat and on the waiting submarine. The men on the lifeboat see *Leander*'s

smoke on the horizon and the captain gets flares ready to signal their position. At this moment, the injured man, who has become more lucid, spots the U-boat's periscope and warns his comrades. They all think he is hallucinating, but he is quite sure. The captain tells the man with the flare to douse it. The crew argue but the captain points out that if Lawson did see a U-boat, the ship coming to their rescue will be sunk; the submarine may have picked up their signal and be using them as bait. One man objects that he is risking the lives of the twenty-four of them on the word of a man who has been raving for days. The captain ignores this and tells his men that if they see a periscope not to point at it; he intends to try to fool the waiting submarine that the ship is approaching from a different direction from its actual course. The man who objected, Bob, reiterates his opinion that they are 'dirty rotten skunks'. They carry out this plan but *Leander* spots them and sails towards them regardless, despite their attempts at signalling a warning and their heading away. The captain of the U-boat cannot understand what is going on, so he checks the horizon through his periscope and spots the smoke.

Tension builds as *Leander* continues to approach, its crew convinced that *Jason*'s crew will be pleased to see them, while the men on the lifeboat continue to try to warn them and the German captain watches through his periscope and prepares to fire his torpedoes. The U-boat fires its torpedoes at the moment when *Leander* realises what the lifeboat is trying to tell her. Only one torpedo hits, so the captain decides to surface to finish *Leander* with gunfire.

Scenes then show *Leander*'s crew preparing to abandon ship, searching for missing crew members and freeing one man who had been trapped. Seeing the U-boat surface, the chief officer and one of the men rush for their gun. The U-boat captain and his



second officer keep checking the situation through the periscope, and although *Leander* appears deserted, decide to finish her off. The merchantman and the U-boat exchange fire, with much shouting from the U-boat captain. Although the chief officer is killed, *Leander* succeeds in sinking the submarine. We see scenes of water rushing in, men desperately trying to get out, with the suggestion that some are prepared to close internal water-tight doors on trapped comrades and save themselves at the expense of others (in contrast to the British ship where the chief officer has stayed to free the trapped man). Finally we are shown men drowning in the U-boat while those who manage to get on to the deck dive into the sea. While we see *Leander* picking up the survivors from *Jason*, there is no indication that they save the German sailors. The film ends with the two captains shaking hands, and *Leander*, badly damaged but still afloat, continuing her journey to Britain.

*Western Approaches* was filmed at sea, as *Picturegoer* informed its readers<sup>608</sup>. The authenticity of the film impressed the critics, as did its use of colour and of real seamen to play the roles in the film. *Kine Weekly* was enthusiastic: 'Magnificent all-Technicolor sea-war documentary...brilliantly combining an eloquent and timely tribute to seamen, with thrilling and inspiring factual drama...It demands universal exhibition on the urgency and justice of its propaganda alone'<sup>609</sup>. Ernest Betts also praised the film, noting the difficulties involved in its making, but seeing the final result as 'the grand, final and authentic story of the Merchant Navy and the Royal Navy bringing home the bacon, killing the U-boats and enabling this tight little island to survive during the blackest days of crisis'<sup>610</sup>. Other critics tended to agree, Edgar Anstey liked its portrayal of 'the skipper of the rescuing merchantman...the most

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<sup>608</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.13, No.621, 9 December 1944, p.3 and article on Dora Wright in the same edition on p.6.

<sup>609</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1961, 16 November 1944, p.33.

<sup>610</sup> Ernest Betts, *Sunday Express*, 19 July 1944.

convincing ship's captain ever to appear on the screen'. He took issue with C.A. Lejeune who had criticised the portrayal of the characters as lacking the extraordinary qualities of ordinary men<sup>611</sup>. William Whitebait also saw the film as 'one more achievement to add to our list of notable English documentaries'. He approved of the portrayal of the Germans, 'the enemy, for once, aren't caricatured – a minor tribute to the film's truthfulness'<sup>612</sup>. The *Manchester Guardian* also praised the film, noting that 'even the U-boat crew, for a refreshing change in the cinema, speak German and not broken English'<sup>613</sup>. *The Times* thought it 'both authentic and austere', liking its portrayal of a heroism which 'is never of the easier and more sentimental kind' of the incident when the captain orders his men not to signal the rescuing *Leander*, pointing out that the men argue and protest, 'but at heart they remain united in a curious faith which expresses itself only in a sigh, a twist of the lips, a shrug of the shoulders'<sup>614</sup>.

Both *Convoy* and *Western Approaches*, a commercial melodrama concentrating on the Royal Navy and a government-sponsored drama-documentary focusing on the Merchant Navy, depict the German submarine fleet in the same way – as treacherous, duplicitous, indifferent to human life and the conventions of the sea. Rather than agreeing with those critics who felt that the portrayal of the U-boat captain and his crew avoided caricature, I suggest that *Western Approaches* follows the precedent set in *Convoy*, if in a slightly more 'realistic' manner. The fact that a fairly stereotypical portrayal was accepted as 'truthful' perhaps indicates how deeply ingrained in people's consciousness the stereotype was.

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<sup>611</sup> Edgar Anstey, *Spectator*, 15 December 1944.

<sup>612</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 9 December 1944.

<sup>613</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 November 1944.

<sup>614</sup> *The Times*, 10 November 1944.



The portrayal of German submarine warfare is that it is cowardly and ungentlemanly, but this is reversed in films showing the British undersea war. In both *Close Quarters* (Jack Lee, 1943), another drama-documentary about a British submarine patrol, and *We Dive At Dawn* (Anthony Asquith, 1943) a melodrama with considerable emphasis on the private lives of the crew of the submarine in question, it is made clear that the Royal Navy does not attack civilian ships but U-boats and German naval installations and shipping. When *Tyrant* (*Close Quarters*) spots a small boat with three men on board on the route from Norway to Scotland, the captain stops to pick them up. They are Norwegians and explain why they left home. The younger, blond man who speaks English explains how a friend of his was arrested by the Gestapo: 'They tramped on his chest with their heavy boots until he died'. The filmmakers thus use the opportunity to impress upon the audience the brutality of the Gestapo's methods and the German treatment of civilians in occupied countries. When John Mills' submarine captain in *We Dive At Dawn* comes across three Germans stranded on a rescue buoy, he does not hesitate to shoot – but at the radio aerial so they cannot give away his position, and he takes the three men on board. When the submarine is depth-charged, one of the Germans becomes hysterical and desperately tries to give Mills information about the *Brandenburg* (their target) which will be useful to the British. One of his comrades attacks and beats him so severely that he later dies. While the film emphasises the decency of the British (and their popularity in occupied Denmark where they get supplies from a Danish tanker captain), it also depicts the Germans briefly: the three consist of the hysterical coward; one, hardly characterised at all, who appears quite ordinary; and the Nazi fanatic. Otherwise the Germans are merely the enemy, to be dealt with as necessary.

The demarcation lines are clear: British submariners are decent seamen who are concerned for their fellows; they only attack the enemy's Service personnel and only kill when necessary. There are just suggestions that this may not be strictly true: in *Close Quarters* one submarine skipper, back from a spell in the Mediterranean, suggests he should attack bridges; he is firmly told that on this patrol off the Norway coast he is after shipping; in *We Dive At Dawn* the captain of another submarine congratulates Mills on his success commenting that he only got a couple of little fishing smacks. The Germans are, as has been stated above, shown as scoundrels. Both films were generally approved of by the critics, although the 'home life' element in *We Dive At Dawn* came in for some criticism<sup>615</sup>.

Another British film of the early war period was *Night Train to Munich* (Carol Reed, 1940). The portrayal of Germans in this film generally reflects the characterisation already established in *The Lion Has Wings*. Much of the film is set in Germany during the period immediately before and after the outbreak of war, and it tells the story of a Czech scientist, Axel Bomasch (James Harcourt) and his daughter Anna (Margaret Lockwood). Bomasch escapes from Czechoslovakia as the Germans invade while Anna is captured and imprisoned in a concentration camp, from where she escapes with the help of Karl Marsen (Paul Henreid, then von Hernried), apparently a Sudeten German but actually a Gestapo agent. The pair escape to England where Anna re-establishes contact with her father who is working for the British. They have a 'body-guard', Dickie Randall (Rex Harrison), but the Germans track them down and kidnap them. Randall goes to Germany to rescue them. A considerable portion of the film is set on a train travelling to Munich during the first night of the war, thus echoing Hitchcock's 1935 thriller, *The Lady Vanishes*.

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<sup>615</sup> See, e.g. C.A Lejeune, *Observer*, 23 May 1943 and *Documentary News Letter*, Vol.4, No.5, 1 August 1943, pp.215-216.



The opening sequences of the film make a brief reference to German aggression, with *Deutschland über Alles* heard on the soundtrack while we see pictures of the Berghof, Hitler's fist thumping on a map of Austria followed by sequences of German troops, the fist thumping down on a map of the Sudetenland and finally on Prague.

The film contains a number of German characters: Marsen himself; Dickie Randall impersonating a German officer, Ulrich Herzog; and a variety of minor characters. Randall 'plays' Major Herzog very much as a stereotypical German military officer, complete with sword (an unlikely piece of equipment to be wearing while visiting various government offices) and a monocle. He seems a loyal German, with talk of his work on the Siegfried Line, his apparent acceptance of the Party line (his praise of the Gestapo officer who rebukes a clerk for an off-the-cuff criticism of an identity card check). There is a hint of German sexual immorality in Herzog's insinuation that he has seduced Anna Bomasch. The character can also be regarded as mocking German formality, with much punctilious saluting and heel-clicking, especially noticeable when he greets Anna at the Naval Ministry. The audience is not, of course, expected to take 'Herzog' seriously as a portrait of a German since he is known to be British; the stereotyped portrayal is accepted by the German characters Randall encounters with the implication that such a type is well known in Germany.

Karl Marsen is the anti-hero to Randall's hero. Both adopt disguises to further their schemes. Marsen pretends to be a Czech patriot to gain Anna's confidence as a way of getting to her father. In his Czech persona he voices strong criticism of the Nazis, telling the doctor in the concentration camp that 'the pillars of Nazi culture [are] the whip and the jackboot' and that the Nazis are doomed to fail: 'You cannot replace

tolerance and decency with brute force'. His claim to be from the Sudetenland is logical in plot terms since it explains his ability to speak Czech and German. Marsen is, however, Gestapo; his Nazi sympathies become clear when he contacts a German agent in London and both exchange the Nazi salute. There is a suggestion in the film that he is attracted to Anna Bomasch; certainly when Herzog is boasting of his conquest, he defends Anna's honour, doubting Herzog's claims. When he later suggests to Herzog that he believes the latter will succeed it is at a point when he is aware of the other's fake identity. He defends his actions to Anna: 'I was doing my duty as a citizen and a subject of the Führer for whose ideas no sacrifice is too great'. Anna suggests that he sounds as though he is quoting from a book, and that such ideas have been drilled into him and others for so long that they are no longer able to think for themselves (a hint that the Germans have been brainwashed). He is depicted throughout as resourceful, intelligent (he is suspicious of Herzog and quickly acts on Caldicott's unfortunate approach to Randall) and able. He can pass as a Czech well enough to fool Anna; he is brave – there is a risk attached to operating as a spy in England, and he demonstrates physical courage when trying to stop Randall and the Bomaschs escaping into Switzerland<sup>616</sup>. However, he is a fanatical Nazi, part of an administration prepared to undertake kidnappings on foreign soil and to imprison Anna to put pressure on her father. His sneering grin when he discovers Herzog is a fake indicates *schadenfreude*, and he is ruthless in his pursuit of the escaping Bomaschs. His deception of Anna emphasises German trickery and treachery.

If there is a considerable degree of stereotyping in the main character portrayals, this does not extend to the minor characters. These are not threatening and can even be quite polite. There is a suggestion that they suffer at the hands of the authorities: the

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<sup>616</sup> Coultass sees him as 'an intelligent personality, a long way from the stiff-necked individuals who are introduced as enemy characters in many other films', Coultass, p.32.



waiter who is reprimanded by 'Herzog' for listening (illegally) to an English radio station; the lack of basic foodstuffs; the reporting of a clerk for a throwaway remark which is mildly critical of the regime; the ordinary people turned out of their railway carriage and the waiting room for the convenience of officers. Even the station official, although rather bossy, is not unfriendly to Charters and Caldicott. When the latter fall into the moving train, they find themselves in a wagon full of German soldiers complete with helmets and rifles. They merely stare at the two Englishmen as they collect their belongings and hurriedly move on (this is after war has been declared). The travel conditions for the soldiers are grim: they are being transported in what appears to be a goods wagon with no seating and straw on the floor; there is an obvious contrast with the relative luxury in which the Gestapo and military officers travel. The Naval Ministry officials are rather incompetent: the Admiral seems a genial soul, easily bamboozled by 'Herzog', and Kampenfeld is the typical bureaucrat; when Herzog is revealed as a fraud and someone is sought to take the blame, Kampenfeld suggests he must sack his secretary.

The film received mixed reviews. *Today's Cinema* thought it a 'cleverly fanciful story'. While it notes 'hint of concentration camp atrocities and working of German espionage system...entertainment's outstanding achievement is genial but pungent guying of alleged Nazi omnipotence, this by mordant characterisation and occasional devastating dialogue'. The opponents are referred to in general throughout the review as Nazis rather than Germans, for example, 'highlights include the delicious baiting of Nazi officialdom by the masquerader'. Paul von Hernried was 'an excellent type as a suave leader of the Gestapo'<sup>617</sup>. *Motion Picture Herald* thought the film 'essentially non-escapist', on the ground of the 'very serious war matters' dealt with, although this

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<sup>617</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.54, No.4418, 22 May 1940, p.9.

seems somewhat perverse since the film is obviously a romantic comedy thriller and the serious elements, for example the concentration camp scene, are nowhere near as disturbing as those in *Pastor Hall*. The reviewer noted the similarities with *The Lady Vanishes*<sup>618</sup>. *Picturegoer* thought the film 'really good fun', enjoying the comedy of Basil Radford and Naunton Wayne<sup>619</sup>. *Kine Weekly* considered the 'tongue-in-cheek treatment ... applied to the stern plot...enables impending and immediate horrors to be turned to laughable as well as thrilling account'. Paul von Hernried was 'thoroughly convincing' as Karl<sup>620</sup>.

*Monthly Film Bulletin* was less impressed, seeing the film as 'slow', while still appreciating its 'abundance of thrills...pleasant romantic interest, and some typically English humour'<sup>621</sup>. William Whitebait criticised the unfortunate juxtaposition of 'Hitler's Europe as we began to see it unrolled ... last September, and the jaunty return of those two brilliant cricket-talking buffoons, Naunton Wayne and Basil Radford'. He also thought the film moved too slowly<sup>622</sup>. *The Times* reviewer seemed to have enjoyed the film, appreciating Rex Harrison for being 'particularly good when disguised as a German soldier'<sup>623</sup>.

James Chapman suggests that the film was popular at the box-office, while noting that 'such films were disliked by the progressive critics for their lack of realism', quoting *Documentary News Letter* which objected to the conflict between 'the hard facts of the real war and its glamorous embellishments in the film'<sup>624</sup>. It is certainly difficult to credit that anyone would have taken the film for anything other than escapism.

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<sup>618</sup> *Motion Picture Herald*, Vol.139, No.10, 8 June 1940, p.37.

<sup>619</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.9, No.482, 7 August 1940, p.14.

<sup>620</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1737, 23 May 1940, p.20.

<sup>621</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.7, No.77, 1 May 1940, p.71.

<sup>622</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 8 September 1940.

<sup>623</sup> *The Times*, 29 July 1940.

<sup>624</sup> Chapman, *The British at War*, pp.170-171.



Richards sees the hero as running `rings around the humourless, ranting, dunderheaded Hun`, and links it to `the apotheosis of the romanticized, class-bound and hopeless out-of-touch war film...*Ships with Wings*`<sup>625</sup>. Murphy states that the film was originally called *Gestapo* and was, according to Carol Reed, intended to be `rather serious`. However with the outbreak of war it was considered appropriate to produce something more light-hearted<sup>626</sup>.

The spy film was a popular genre during the war years as it had been in the interwar period. It fitted very well with the ideological concept of the People`s War. If a German spy was shown operating in Britain, it gave an opportunity to show ordinary British people taking a direct part in the struggle against the foe. It also helped to emphasise the need for everyone to be security conscious. Concern about German spies was widespread, although there is little evidence that Germany had a successful spy network in operation in Britain during the Second World War<sup>627</sup>. However, as Richards points out:

the promotion of the idea of a vast army of German sympathisers, besides keeping people on their toes, did serve one useful function. It provided a convenient scapegoat for defeats and disasters and discouraged people from concentrating on the military invincibility of the German forces, an idea strongly fostered by the success of *blitzkrieg*<sup>628</sup>.

Contemporary spy films began to appear early on in the war. *Contraband* (Powell and Pressburger, 1940) featured a German spy ring based in London. One is a woman,

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<sup>625</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Best of British*, p.58.

<sup>626</sup> Murphy, p.46.

<sup>627</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, pp.96-97.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

Miss Lang (Phoebe Kershaw), although it is not clear whether she is German (as her fair hair and 'Aryan' appearance might be intended to indicate) or a British traitor. The hero (Conrad Veidt as Captain Andersen) and heroine (Valerie Hobson as Mrs. Sørensen) are captured by the spies and Mrs Sørensen is interrogated by their leader, Van Dyne. Their conversation makes it clear that they have met before, in Düsseldorf (establishing Van Dyne as German, despite his Dutch name), and he knows how to make prisoners talk. She taunts him, informing him that 'We are not Germans, who shoot first and ask questions afterwards'. The German plot is revealed: Mrs. Sørensen is a British spy who has been finding out the names of German ships travelling as neutrals and passing the information on to the British Admiralty. The Germans intend to inform the Admiralty that a neutral American ship is actually German, thereby ensuring that the British stop the ship. A stand-off will ensue between the British and American captains and 'That's how wars start'. German desire to drive a wedge between the British and US governments is thus demonstrated. The Germans are shown as brutal, completely ruthless to civilians who stand in their way. They are also somewhat incompetent: not only did Mrs. Sørensen get away from Van Dyne in Düsseldorf but she and Andersen manage to escape from him in London. The Germans are finally defeated with the help of Danish workers from a nearby restaurant.

The film got reasonably favourable reviews. *The Times* liked the more factual sequences of the work of contraband control and those in the black-out, but was less enthralled by the conflict between the stars and the spies<sup>629</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* considered that: 'The comparison between the British and German methods of dealing with neutrals is not too heavily stressed...', clearly feeling that anti-German propaganda on this subject had been somewhat heavy-handed<sup>630</sup>. *Today's Cinema* also

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<sup>629</sup> *The Times*, 26 March 1940.

<sup>630</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.7, No.76, 1 May 1940, p.53.



praised both the film ('Excellent general entertainment, topicality ensuring success as box-office proposition') and the acting. Like *The Times*, it admired the earlier, more factual scenes rather than the 'rather lurid spy melodrama'<sup>631</sup>. *Kine Weekly* was also positive, noting the 'elegant, thrilling, romantic espionage melodrama, sandwiched between crisp and authentic commentary on the workings of the British Contraband Control'<sup>632</sup>.

Robert Murphy notes that *Contraband* was a follow-up to *The Spy in Black* which had 'found a receptive audience in the early months of the war'. He suggested that *Contraband* provided Conrad Veidt 'with a rare opportunity to play a good German (albeit in the guise of a Dane) – correct, formal, gentlemanly, courteous, brave ...rather than a Nazi villain'<sup>633</sup>. This is an interesting suggestion and Veidt, the star, was certainly known as a German with left-wing views who had fled from Germany<sup>634</sup>. However, in the film it is his Danish qualities which are emphasised: he was an officer in the Danish navy; his identification with the Danes who frequent 'The Three Vikings'; his opposition to the German spy ring. It seems unlikely that any audience in 1940 would have seen this character as a surrogate German. While there is little information on its popular reception, the film did do reasonably well in the Majestic, Macclesfield<sup>635</sup>.

*Went the Day Well?* (Cavalcanti, 1942) deals with a German invasion of Britain. It was made in 1942 against a background of fears of military incompetence and the possibility of invasion, although the situation had improved by the time the film was

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<sup>631</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.54, No.4394, 27 March 1940, p.10.

<sup>632</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1718, 21 March 1940, p.26.

<sup>633</sup> Murphy, pp.21-22.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, p.21.

<sup>635</sup> Julian Poole, 'British Cinema Attendance in Wartime: audience preference at the Majestic, Macclesfield, 1939-1946' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 7, No.1, 1987, pp.15-34, p.20.

released<sup>636</sup>. It received official assistance from the Gloucestershire Regiment. Action takes place in the peaceful village of Bramley End. Continuity between past and present is stressed, in Charlie Sims' (Mervyn Johns) opening monologue where he mentioned the village church, parts of which date back to the Thirteenth Century. This opening statement is reassuring to the audience: the Germans have attempted an invasion, but the film takes place after its defeat and the British winning of the war. Having set the scene, the action moves back to the then near contemporary period of Whitsun weekend 1942.

S.P. Mackenzie points out that while the Germans in *Went the Day Well?* are brutal thugs, Graham Greene's original story, published in June 1940, was a fairly sympathetic portrayal of Germans. They show decency towards the villagers, and the poacher who shoots the dying German lieutenant has guilt feelings afterwards. Mackenzie points out the change in MoI's propaganda agenda from drawing a distinction between true Nazis and ordinary Germans in 1940 to an 'image presented of the enemy being one of uniform fanaticism and brutality' in 1942<sup>637</sup>.

Initially the Germans pass as British. 'Major Hammond' (Basil Sydney) and 'Lieutenant Maxwell' (David Farrar) are polite and friendly to the villagers, and happily share dinner with Mrs. Fraser (Marie Lohr) and her other guests. There are hints that the Germans are different from the British. When Hammond/Ortler asks his contact, Wilsford (Leslie Banks), if the latter has any advice, he is told to send some of his men to the village pub for a drink and for the men billeted on the villagers to help around the house – the implication being that German soldiers are not friendly with civilians or helpful to those they are billeted on. One of the soldiers catches George

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<sup>636</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.126.

<sup>637</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, 'Nazis into Germans: *Went the Day Well?* (1942) and *The Eagle Has Landed* (1976)' in *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol.31, no 2, Summer 2003, pp.83-92, pp.84-85.



Truscott (Harry Fowler) poking around in their equipment and grabs the boy by the ear. His behaviour attracts the attention of the village postmistress, Mrs. Collins (Muriel George), and she rounds on him for ill-treating a child, 'You're nothing better than a German'.

The moment the Germans are unmasked they reveal their true colours. Villagers are herded into the church with threats and bullying behaviour; the Vicar is shot to prevent his sounding the church bell; Leutnant Jung threatens to shoot five children in reprisal for an escape attempt (he appears to be drunk at the time); various villagers who try to resist are killed, including Mrs. Collins; the Home Guard are shot down in cold blood as they cycle home from an exercise. Germans spare neither women nor children nor the elderly. They are also explicitly associated with lack of Christianity: the Vicar refuses to 'bow down before the enemies of the Christian faith'; and with sexual immorality – Mrs. Collins' lodger boasts of not being married but of having two fine sons 'who will soon be old enough to fight' - again the suggestion that Germans are bred to be warlike.

The character of Oliver Wilsford, a village leader and corporal in the Home Guard, represents the enemy within. Apparently a pillar of the local community, he is in fact working for the Germans. It is unclear whether he is a British turncoat or an enemy agent. Penelope Houston states that the shooting script is more explicit than the film about the fact that Wilsford is a German agent, and goes on to emphasise the ambiguity of the character in the film<sup>638</sup>. The film implies that Wilsford is a Fifth Columnist rather than a German<sup>639</sup>: in the dinner party scene at the Manor, there is a discussion of Fifth Columnists and whether they exist in England, Wilsford cleverly turning the talk

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<sup>638</sup> Penelope Houston, *Went the Day Well?*, London, British Film Institute, 1992, p.27.

<sup>639</sup> Fox sees Wilsford as a Fifth Columnist, Fox, p. 153.

away by suggesting that Mrs. Fraser could be one because she likes exercising power. Throughout the film Wilsford retains a very English persona: he stands up to Major Ortler, refusing to take orders from him, pointing out that he is needed because he can interact on the Germans' behalf with the villagers. He manages to continue fooling the villagers as to his good intentions right to the end; only Nora and Mrs. Fraser know the truth, having overheard a conversation between Wilsford and Jung. Eventually Wilsford is shot by Nora, an ironic turn of events since at the beginning of the film she is clearly attracted to him. The film ends with Mervyn Johns again taking up the story, explaining how the invasion 'went up in smoke' and 'old Hitler' got his just deserts.

The critics were divided about the film. *Documentary News Letter* saw it as a 'good film in spite of its faults which are many ... it keeps you sitting on the edge of your seat and the fact that the whole thing can be torn to pieces doesn't matter in the least', but acknowledged that not everyone agreed<sup>640</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* was equivocal, admiring some of the performances, but suggesting that 'the value of the film could have been increased by a slightly different approach and more convincing dialogue and direction'<sup>641</sup>. The *Manchester Guardian* thought the film had 'plenty of excitement' and 'the realism of Nazi methods applied in home surroundings is salutary for slothful minds', but felt that 'some of the episodes have minor characters blurred at the edges'<sup>642</sup>. *The Scotsman* was much more dismissive. The reviewer appreciated the film's message to be on the watch for Fifth Columnists, but felt that the 'moral is weakly painted'. As far as the Germans were concerned, 'the paratroopers, although they display some of the typical Nazi brutality, show rather less efficiency than one might expect of any troops (Nazi or otherwise), and there is an atmosphere of make-

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<sup>640</sup> *Documentary News Letter*, Vol.3, No.11/12, 1 November 1942, p.149.

<sup>641</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.9, No.107, 1 December 1942, p.142.

<sup>642</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 27 January 1943.



believe and childish imagination covering the whole development of the plot<sup>643</sup>. Dilys Powell rather admired the film seeing it as benefiting from the confines of time and space imposed on it, and she praised the cast<sup>644</sup>. C.A. Lejeune, on the other hand, felt the actors never forgot to be actors, and ridiculed the plot. She disliked the portrayal of the Germans: 'It is a dangerous thing to show your opponents as clowns or bullies, who only get results by treachery, brute force, or the long arm of coincidence'<sup>645</sup>. William Whitebait thought 'it is the sort of film that, after three years of war, with little show and no great expenditure of money we can make better than anyone ... it bridges the gap between talkies and life, between actors and human beings, and English audiences will enjoy and understand it'. He thought the film was released at an inopportune time, when fears of invasion were low, although the action 'made for smooth excitement' and he admired the performances<sup>646</sup>.

There is some dispute as to how popular the film was: Richards and Sheridan suggest that it was popular with members of the public<sup>647</sup>, although it only registered as run-of-the-mill fare at the Regent, Portsmouth<sup>648</sup>, and Mackenzie states that 'it did not do much at the box office'<sup>649</sup>.

Aldgate discusses the film in detail in *Britain Can Take It*, pointing out that Greene's original story was part of a British propaganda campaign in the USA<sup>650</sup>. He puts the film in context of British complacency about the possibility of an invasion, the particular historical circumstances of the flight of three German warships through the

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<sup>643</sup> *The Scotsman*, 26 January 1943.

<sup>644</sup> Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 1 November 1942.

<sup>645</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Chronicle*, 1 November 1942.

<sup>646</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 31 October 1942.

<sup>647</sup> Richards and Sheridan, pp. 269, 273, 281, 286, where the film is mentioned by respondents as a favourite.

<sup>648</sup> Sue Harper, 'Fragmentation and Crisis', p.387

<sup>649</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *British War Films*, p. 100.

<sup>650</sup> Aldgate and Richards, p. 115.

English Channel in February 1942<sup>651</sup>, and the 'Anger Campaigns' with their emphasis on German brutality<sup>652</sup>. 'It is difficult to escape the conclusion that it was, in effect, an "official" film and that it carried the MoI stamp of approval'<sup>653</sup>. James Chapman comments on the degree of violence shown in the film<sup>654</sup>.

*The Next of Kin* (Thorold Dickinson, 1942) began life as a film for the military about the dangers of careless talk: 'the whole production directly sponsored by the War Office, was an official secret'<sup>655</sup>. It was subsequently put on general release as a warning to the public. The film's premise is that enemy spies are everywhere, listening for odd snippets of information which, harmless in themselves perhaps, provide useful clues to the enemy about future British operations when all the apparently innocuous pieces are put together.

Unlike *Went the Day Well?* where the British people are shown as all pulling together to defeat the common foe, *The Next of Kin* shows the British as complacent, lacking in any sense of the need for security, and helpfully telling complete strangers useful facts about military manoeuvres, headquarters and so on. The plot centres on a planned raid on German submarine pens on the French coast; German attacks on British shipping are causing unsustainable losses and there is a need for action. Information is received from the French Resistance about a new submarine base in the apparently unfortified French port of Norville and a raid is set up to blow up the lock gates and render the port useless for German purposes. The film follows the brigade training for the attack, showing how soldiers carelessly exchange information with civilians and how this can lead to the enemy being forewarned of what is being planned and be waiting for the

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<sup>651</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>652</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>653</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>654</sup> Chapman, *The British at War*, p.228.

<sup>655</sup> C.A Lejeune, *Daily Sketch*, 3 June 1942.



British as they land. The result is a heavy loss of British lives during the assault (although, reassuringly, the raid itself is successful) and the need to send the telegrams informing the next of kin of the death of a loved one. The final scene of the film shows that well-known comedy duo, Charters and Caldicott, gossiping about classified information in a railway compartment, ignoring the presence of the German spy (Mervyn Johns). This emphasises the film's message, that the Germans have ears everywhere and that the listener might just be that harmless middle-aged man in the corner.

The film features several German spies. The head of the local network at Westport (presumably Liverpool), near to where the brigade is training at Watercombe, is Mr. Barrett (Stephen Murray). An apparently innocent bookshop proprietor (who boasts of his anti-Nazi reputation), he even employs a Dutch refugee, Beppie Leemans (Nova Pilbeam). As the film makes clear, he is a ruthless and determined man and despite his apparent Englishness is half-German on his mother's side. He is shown putting pressure on Beppie to get information from her soldier boyfriend, threatening the arrest of her parents in Rotterdam if she fails to co-operate. Finding out the brigade is in danger, she kills him.

Once the Germans become aware that something important is going on, two agents are sent from Germany. One is quickly unmasked. The other whose name for British purposes is Mr. Davis, is landed by U-boat and successfully passes for a small businessman who has been bombed out of his home. He quickly establishes contact with Barrett and is ordered to stay at a hotel in Watercombe to ascertain what the brigade is doing. He has good quality British papers; Barrett remarks, 'God, our people are thorough'. Some fun is had at the bookshop; while waiting to see Barrett, Davis

amuses himself by looking at a book of pictures of naked women (a hint at the German reputation for sexual immorality?), and when called through to speak to Barrett is examining a book entitled *I Am a Nazi Agent*.

However, there is nothing amusing about Davis. He quietly settles down into the hotel, attracting sympathy for his plight as a blitz survivor and liked for his good manners. He even gets away with walking along the cliff-top to watch the brigade exercises; when stopped he apologises for entering a restricted area, pointing out that there is nothing to indicate that his presence is forbidden (another lapse in security). Later, when he comes across Beppie after she has killed Barrett, he quickly knocks her out and then lays her by the gas fire which he turns on, making her death look like suicide. He obtains employment at a munitions factory, and makes friends with an ATS girl, politely assisting her to change a wheel on a lorry. She invites him to a dance, where a friendly sergeant unwittingly gives him more useful information. At the end of the film, he is still operating successfully.

Another German spy network is centred on Miss Clare, an exotic dancer, and her dresser 'Ma' Webster. Miss Clare is a drug addict and her co-operation is secured through Ma supplying her with drugs. There is a hint that Ma herself is addicted; when Miss Clare suggests that she can manage without the drugs Ma tells her that giving up is impossible, she herself knows. Miss Clare operates by making friends with a young officer and then pumping him for information, which Ma (one assumes it is Ma) passes on through a transmitter which she hides in a basket of stage costumes. Again, German ruthlessness is emphasised, the willingness to exploit Miss Clare's addiction.



The film shows the German end of the spy operation as efficient. The general in charge is very much the caricature German officer, formal and complete with eye-glass, bald head and cigarette in an elegant holder; his junior officer, Horn, clicks his heels firmly when making reports<sup>656</sup>.

*The Next of Kin* echoes the portrayal of Germans in *Went the Day Well?*. Germans can easily pass as British; Barrett is in fact half-British, although his insistence on his German blood echoes the belief that all Germans are alike and tainted in some respect. Both Davis and his fellow agent have spent time in Britain. However, unlike the British who are shown as decent, freedom-loving, honest people, the Germans are ruthlessly efficient in pursuit of their purposes, brutal and exploitative. They may look British but their underlying character is very different. British friendliness and openness is exploited. The Germans are an enemy within; they have agents or spies everywhere, a sinister underground web of intrigue. British tolerance of neutrals and refugees is taken advantage of; Beppie is open to blackmail through her family under German occupation; messages are sent abroad through an Irish seaman. In the post-war period, this image of the subversive spy network run by ruthless foreign agents and supported by turncoat British was applied to Soviet espionage operations in Britain.

Reviews of the film were favourable. C.A Lejeune praised it as 'one of the very best films ever made in this country. Since nobody concerned in it, from producer to crowd artist, had any reason to keep his eye on the box-office, everybody was able to keep his mind on the job'. She noted how everyone was sorry for the Mervyn Johns character, 'a pleasant pathetic little man'<sup>657</sup>. The *Tatler* agreed: 'This is a picture for all to see; and the sooner it is released everywhere, up and down the country, the better will it be

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<sup>656</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, p.103.

<sup>657</sup> C.A Lejeune, *Sketch*, 3 June 1942.

for all lovers of patriotic, thinking and cautionary drama<sup>658</sup>. Dilys Powell also praised the film: `A cautionary tale, in fact: but a tale told with authority and conviction... which...should seal all our lips for the duration`. She singled out the performances of Mervyn Johns and Stephen Murray as the enemy agents<sup>659</sup>. William Whitebait also approved: `*Next of Kin*... is an admirable example of the new kind of English film, actual, thrilling, and taking its tune from events. It compares well with the reconstructions of war incidents favoured by the Russians`. He too praised `Mervyn Johns` faultless performance`<sup>660</sup>. *Kine Weekly* also enjoyed the film: noting that `its selling angles...paradoxically enough, have already been firmly established by word of mouth; the merits of the picture have been whispered both in the Trade and lay Press. Excellent propaganda proposition, a box-office certainty for all classes ... Mervyn Johns is brilliant as the unassuming but traitorous Mr. Davis`<sup>661</sup>.

The film was successful at the box-office<sup>662</sup>. Its release was delayed until after the St. Nazaire raid in March 1942 on the orders of Winston Churchill; the fictional film was `uncomfortably similar in its aims to the fictional attack on Norville`<sup>663</sup>. `The Prime Minister...when shown the film at Chequers, was worried that it was so graphic that “it would cause unnecessary alarm and despondency to a great number of people”, so the film was shown `with eighty feet of the most graphic shots cut to avoid undue distress`<sup>664</sup>. Richards discusses in detail the official input to the film script, so the view of the Germans in the film can be said to reflect Establishment ideas, albeit tailored to fit the propaganda agenda of the film<sup>665</sup>.

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<sup>658</sup> *Tatler*, 27 May 1942.

<sup>659</sup> Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 17 May 1942.

<sup>660</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 23 May 1942.

<sup>661</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1831, 21 May 1942, p.20.

<sup>662</sup> S.P.Mackenzie, *British War Films*, p.99.

<sup>663</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>664</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>665</sup> Aldgate and Richards, *Britain Can Take It*, pp.99-100 and 105-108.



Once war had been declared, one effective genre for showing German brutality and oppression was through Resistance films. A good example of such a film is *The Day Will Dawn* (Harold French, 1942), which dealt with Nazi activities in Norway. It was made with the acknowledged co-operation of the Air Ministry, War Office and the Norwegian Government (in exile). The film opens with a voice-over stating: 'Terror rules in Europe. The people are chained', before going on to state that however their souls are not crushed. We are then shown a map of Poland focusing on Warsaw, an explosion and marching, jack-booted feet – the German army. The film is based on a newspaper office, and tells the story of a young former sports reporter, Colin Metcalfe (Hugh Williams), who is sent to Norway to cover events there. German responsibility for the war is clearly shown in a scene where Colin and a colleague, Frank Lockwood (Ralph Richardson) discuss the reasons for fighting with a man in a pub who questions whether Danzig is worth fighting for.

The action then moves to 'eight months later', with Metcalfe in Norway. The presence of the Germans in this neutral country is revealed in a bar scene, where Metcalfe and the Norwegians end up in a brawl with some German sailors. Colin's female companion is later revealed as a German agent. Through this incident Colin makes friends with Alstad (Finlay Currie), a Norwegian skipper who volunteers to show him what the Germans are up to. They sail for Langedal, the captain's home port, and are waylaid and fired on by a U-boat, then nearly run over by a German merchant vessel from which come the sound of English voices singing *Lily of Laguna*, a reference perhaps to the *Altmark*. When Alstad tries to report these experiences to the local police chief, Gunter (Griffith Jones), the latter is rather dismissive, implying Alstad is inclined to imagine such sightings.

Gunter's reluctance to act on Alstad's reports is due to his working for the Germans, as a subsequent scene of his reporting to the German Kommandant shows. The latter introduces Gunter as one who has German blood and is popular with the locals. The conversation between the men makes it clear that invasion is coming 'to head off British warmongering'. In the fjord is a German oil refinery with many German engineers with the implication that they will help with the invasion.

Colin reports his experiences to the Naval Attaché at the British Embassy, who seems to dismiss it. However, his sending of a message to the Admiralty once Colin has left indicates he is not as indifferent as his earlier behaviour suggests. Metcalfe meanwhile reports to his paper: the German Embassy has shown a film to all top Norwegians, *Baptism of Fire*, showing the destruction of Warsaw. Metcalfe describes this as 'an old Nazi trick' to terrify your opponents prior to attacking them – a similar point is made by Scott in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*. Kari (Deborah Kerr), Alstad's daughter, comes to Oslo to warn him that two large German ships have arrived in Bergen, heavily loaded but not discharging any cargo – it is suspected that they contain invasion troops.

After an interlude during which Colin is kidnapped by the Germans and rescued, we see preparations for him to be parachuted back into Norway to locate a submarine base which is causing problems to British shipping. It is suspected that this is in Lange fjord. Colin finds Lange fjord full of marching German soldiers, and Kari, apparently a collaborator, ready to marry Gunter, now revealed as a Quisling. However, an incident in the People's House, where Kari saves Colin from capture, shows that she is still a loyal Norwegian – she agreed to marry Gunter in return for his obtaining her father's release from a concentration camp. A message is sent to London informing of the location of the U-boat base, and Colin and Alstad go to the base to provide a light to



guide the British bombers. This is a communal effort; everyone, the film suggests, is united against the German occupier.

Small scenes show the German Kommandant giving the U-boat pack its orders, the objective is British convoys and flotillas in the North Atlantic. He toasts 'the greatness of the German fleet', explaining, after the U-boat men have left, that 'once we have broken the Atlantic bridge the war is won'. His companion asks why the naval officers would not drink the Führer's toast, and is told that the German navy has British naval traditions: 'They have given up chivalry, picking up survivors, but still won't drink the Führer's toast – yet' - a small maintenance of the distinction between Germans and Nazis. A German soldiers' conversation overheard by Colin and Alstad includes the information that the site of the base, hidden by a cliff, had been chosen for this purpose while Germany was still down – implying that this plan was drawn up some time ago, perhaps before Hitler came to power.

Finally German occupation methods are revealed. After the raid, the Germans round up eight hostages including Olaf (Niall MacGinnis), a newly-married young man.

When Colin gives himself up to try to save the hostages – the Germans have said that if the Englishman surrenders, the hostages will be released – all are still condemned to be executed. Kari is arrested as a spy, and refuses Gunter's offer to get her released if she will marry him.

Interviewed by the Kommandant, Colin asks how it is that so many German soldiers can speak Norwegian, then answers his own question: because at the end of the First World War, the Norwegians gave homes and help to German children; now those children are returning as conquerors. In the condemned cell, he voices his desire to tell

his readers about the occupied territories where resistance continues. While four hostages are executed, four (including Kari, Colin and Olaf) are rescued by the British navy. Gunter sees the Kommandant about to run from the British and reproaches him: 'You made me believe that you were invincible and now you're going away'. The Kommandant shoots him: 'You are of no further use to the Reich', and makes his escape disguised as an ordinary soldier; again the implication that Germans save themselves at the expense of others. The film ends with Colin, Kari, Olaf and Gerda going to England with the troops, and a quotation from a speech by Churchill to the US Senate, promising that the occupied countries will experience freedom again.

The critics were divided about the film. William Whitebait noted the shift from 'films of Nazi brutality at home...[to] glimpses into "occupied territory"'. He thought the film exciting, but considered its ending lacking in subtlety<sup>666</sup>. C.A Lejeune felt that *The Day Will Dawn* failed, 'never gets beyond the inspired mediocre'<sup>667</sup>. *Today's Cinema* thought the film an 'inspiring story' with a 'noble theme ... of a type rarely seen on our screens'<sup>668</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* also appreciated the film: 'There is genius in the direction and the acting is as good as can be'<sup>669</sup>. *The Times*, however, was more dismissive: the reviewer thought the storyline was 'not fitted...smoothly into the tribute...to the heroism of a people who are conquered but who persist in calling their souls their own'. While considering the treatment of the civilian population shown was 'nothing improbable...quislings do cringe before their protectors, the civil population is bullied, hostages are taken and shot', the writer felt the film was crude and 'the final rescue by the commandos is in keeping not so much with a narrative that sets out to commemorate the human spirit as with the tradition of blood-and-thunder

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<sup>666</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 9 May 1942.

<sup>667</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 10 May 1942.

<sup>668</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.58, No.4720, 8 May 1942, p.17.

<sup>669</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.9, No.101, 31 May 1942, p.57.



melodrama<sup>670</sup>. Indeed, after a touching scene in the death cell, with most of the hostages showing brave resignation and Deborah Kerr's gradual transition from bravely facing the inevitable to terror as the first four are taken out and shot (an event which is visible to those remaining through a small window – an example of German sadism?), the denouement of allowing the main characters to escape their fate seems reminiscent of the arrival of the Seventh Cavalry in a Western.

*The Day Will Dawn* was one of a series of Resistance films made during the middle years of the war<sup>671</sup>. Murphy points out that the Nazis in these films 'usually consisted of hateful young thugs...; gleeful sadists...; sneering cynics...; and blustering bullies...' <sup>672</sup>. While this is partly true, I have argued that the portrayals of Gerte in *Pastor Hall* and of Rabenau in *Freedom Radio* are rather more subtle than the quoted comment would suggest. *The Day Will Dawn* reiterates the propaganda picture of Germans in many wartime British films: there is the ingratitude and abuse of hospitality in attacking a people who had shown them kindness; the underhand treachery of the spying operations in Norway; the suggestion (in the construction of the U-boat base having been begun some time before) of the continuation between the Weimar government and the Nazis; the brutality to the occupied Norwegians; and the depiction of the ordinary German soldier as a jack-booted automaton.

Germans were also shown as exploiting ideological weaknesses. In *Unpublished Story* (Harold French, 1942), a decent pacifist, Mr. Trapes (Frederick Cooper), is used by a German spy ring as a means of demoralising the British people during the blitz. When Trapes realises the true nature of Nazi war-making, he changes his views, only to come under intense pressure from the spies not to do so. The film consistently shows the

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<sup>670</sup> *The Times*, 6 May 1942.

<sup>671</sup> Murphy, p.90.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p.108.

Germans (or Nazis) as ruthless. They recognise no difference between civilians and combatants. They can pass as British (Stannard and the other agents behave convincingly) but once they stop play-acting their true character is revealed. They employ devious methods to serve their ends, and are capable of subverting the anti-social elements in society for this purpose, and of exploiting British openness to refugees.

The critics were divided as to the merits of the film. All praised the realistic depiction of London during the blitz. C.A. Lejeune thought it, apart from the 'personal story', a rather admirable film. 'It sketches, with a good deal of honesty, some aspects of the daily life of Londoners in that tremendous summer of 1940...' <sup>673</sup>. Dilys Powell seemed to agree: 'a sincere enough attempt by a British producer to make a film about journalists in the London air raids, with a bit of Fifth Column activity thrown in'. She however, 'found the action a little halting now and then' <sup>674</sup>. *Motion Picture Herald* noted that 'a London trade audience gave the film wrapt attention, reacted to the pathos and the comedy, accorded it a hearty burst of applause at the close' <sup>675</sup>. *Today's Cinema* was also enthusiastic about the film, running both a report on the presentation of 'inspiring saga of London at war' <sup>676</sup> and according it praise in the review, 'dynamic story of journalistic scoop...and why it could never be published. Distinguished theme reaffirms world-wide knowledge of how aerial frightfulness only cemented British determination to win through...'. The realistic depiction of the blitz was praised, as were the performances. The 'terrible and poignant spectacle of London's winter agony in 1940-1941...is made a symbol of a nation united...'. The reviewer noted the 'subsidiary detail of Nazi schemings under the very nose of Fleet Street [and] their

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<sup>673</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 21 June 1942.

<sup>674</sup> Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 21 June 1942.

<sup>675</sup> *Motion Picture Herald*, Vol.147, No.2, 11 April 1942, p.598.

<sup>676</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.58, No.4703, 27 March 1942, p.3.



torture of a man of peace who found his soul at the height of a blitz'<sup>677</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* was less complimentary: 'Here is a good story that should have made a first-rate film... There is, however, certain good propaganda in the film, and it is, except for the hypercritical, entertaining'<sup>678</sup>.

Many films did not make any attempt to characterise the Germans in detail: they were simply the enemy and their undesirable characteristics were taken for granted.

However it can be argued that in these cases the stereotype is assumed and the glimpses afforded of 'the other side' rely on and reinforce this stereotype. I will compare two films, the fictional *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (Powell and Pressburger, 1942), a Resistance film, and *Desert Victory* (Roy Boulting, 1943), an extremely successful documentary dealing with the British victory at El Alamein.

*One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* tells the story of the crew of a British bomber, B for Bertie, whose crew, following a raid over Stuttgart, are forced to bail out over occupied Holland. The film then follows their travels across Holland back to England, helped by the Dutch Resistance. The enemy is generally an unseen and uncharacterised presence. It is assumed that the audience is aware that the enemy are evil and brutal and there is a need for the Allies to defeat them. While no individual Germans are shown (except in two brief incidents near the end of the film), a very clear portrait of the German occupier's nature is revealed in the way they are depicted.

The opening sequence acknowledges the co-operation of the RAF, the Air Ministry, and the Royal Netherlands Government (in exile), and then shows a report from that Government detailing the deaths of five Dutchmen 'executed by the *Herrenvolk*' for

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<sup>677</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>678</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.9, No.100, 1 May 1942, p.42.

helping British aircrew to escape. One shot thus neatly encapsulates German ruthlessness in shooting Dutch resisters, the risks attached to helping escaping aircrew for the Dutch people, and the German claim of superiority to other races.

The film introduces the individual members of the crew, the usual wartime 'mixed bag' of classes and regions. Mackenzie notes that 'the choice of target – a Mercedes-Benz works in Stuttgart – [was] not in any way at odds with the official line that Bomber Command was striking with precision at industrial targets'<sup>679</sup>. A conversation between Geoff Hickman (Bernard Miles) and the skipper (Hugh Burden) during the flight emphasises certain British stereotypes of Germans, and the interaction between Britain and Germany prior to the war. Both have dated German girls in the past, Hickman's being a girl from Stuttgart, 'a big, blond job', a good cook who was always singing, with a reference to the composer of her favourite song having been a Jew. The skipper's nurse was also 'a big, blond girl', and the two then proceed to discuss what they know of Stuttgart.

Details of the escape are shown. A sequence of the discussion between the Dutch locals about whether to trust the men or not indicates Dutch concerns that they may be a German plant. Glimpses of the Germans are revealed. As a large group of local people (and the escapers) cycle to church a German armoured vehicle screams by: it is loud, mechanical, impersonal, an alien presence in the peaceful and quiet landscape. Bernard Miles draws attention to this with his comment, 'Noisy beggars, aren't they?'. During the church service, there is the sound of a siren in the distance, the door opens and German voices are heard. Again the invader is noisy, the people, invited by their priest to pray, are quiet. A German enters: we see his boots walking across the floor;

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<sup>679</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *British War Films*, p.50.



never in close up, he is seen from behind, in the organist's mirror. German bureaucracy (and the difficulties the Dutch experience) is emphasised by the permits to travel which the party has to procure, and shots of the rubber stamping of each permit. At one point the escapers are nearly betrayed. Dining at the house of a burgomaster, they are discovered by De Jong, a local Quisling who is very friendly with the Germans – he has just sent them some gramophone records, carried by the burgomaster's son, Cornelius, much to his father's disgust. It transpires that the boy has swapped all De Jong's records for copies of the Dutch national anthem. The burgomaster is amused, De Jong will now be in trouble. The latter's shift from triumphant discovery to cringing terror as he realises that the Germans are off to his house 'with fixed bayonets', and his grovelling appeal to the priest for his help emphasise the brutality of the German regime. De Jong knows he can expect no mercy from that quarter, as the priest's remark that 'you know your friends', makes clear.

Jo de Vries (Googie Withers) is popular with the Germans – she can even get an *Unteroffizier* to assign men to unload a cargo for her business. She shows a slight sympathy for them at one point, telling Frank (Hugh Williams) she would rather be Dutch than German, they are an unhappy people who want to believe someone's their friend – an attitude of mind which it is clear helps her to hoodwink them. However she is ruthless in dealing with those who get in her way, as her disposal of the two Germans who interfere with the escape makes clear. During an air raid she watches the 'Germans claiming to be masters of the earth – running for shelter', an event which she states heartens the occupied peoples. While stressing the German *Herrenvolk* claim again, this short sequence indicates that they are as vulnerable as anyone else; by implication their claims of superiority are false.

The critics praised the film. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, thought it 'an exceedingly good flying-war film...first-class direction...sincere acting from people who know their job', all of which put it 'at the top of its class so far'. It was seen as 'a film worth seeing with excellent propaganda value...' <sup>680</sup>. C.A. Lejeune compared the film to *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, seeing the films as mirror images of one another, the one about a British escape, the other focussed on a German attempt to get from belligerent Canada to the USA. While noting the ideological difference that 'our' men got through and the Germans did not, she does not mention the other obvious difference which is that the British are welcomed with great kindness and courage by nearly all the Dutch people they encounter, while the Germans are travelling across hostile territory – a better parallel would be a British group escaping from Germany itself. She thought 'the whole effect' of the film was 'a little slow', but felt that 'many of these incidents are quite beautifully done' <sup>681</sup>. William Whitebait thought the film 'the best non-documentary film that the war has inspired', liking in particular the fact that there was 'no display of initiative or sex-appeal, no nonsense about Paladins of the Air, but ordinary Englishmen resolutely doing a job as well as it can be done'. He also thought the subject-matter good: 'I find no subject now more moving than the never-ceasing war waged by the occupied countries against their oppressors' <sup>682</sup>. *The Times* agreed, noting especially the portrayal of the Germans in the film:

Mr. Powell does not say much and there are no shots of brutal Nazis bayoneting babies, but he conveys the brooding, oppressive, pervasive atmosphere that hangs over the occupied countries. The Nazis are there, and their presence is brought vividly to the senses by the scrape of their jack-boots on the stone floor of a church, by their shadows in an open doorway, and this sinister

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<sup>680</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.9, No.100, 1 May 1942, p.42.

<sup>681</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Daily Sketch*, 6 May 1942.

<sup>682</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 2 May 1942.



understatement of their power flings into relief the courage of the population which is prepared to work against them, and to dare death to help those who are pledged to the cause of freedom<sup>683</sup>.

The trade press were equally enthusiastic. *Kine Weekly* described the film as 'spectacular, up-to-the-minute war time aerial epic...grand entertainment of all classes and ages'. It too appreciated the depiction of the Germans: 'The by-play also reveals the Nazis and their Quislings in their true colours...' . The film had an 'irresistible patriotic angle'<sup>684</sup>. *Motion Picture Herald* noted that 'a packed trade audience in London gave the film a wrapt attention, and a vigorous hand at the close'<sup>685</sup>.

Mackenzie notes the film had official sanction and 'the Air Ministry co-operated to the same lavish extent as it had over *Target for Tonight*'<sup>686</sup>. The film was also widely publicised and it 'rapidly developed into a box-office success'<sup>687</sup>.

*Desert Victory* was a British documentary of 1942 depicting the El Alamein campaign, directed by Roy Boulting and produced through the Army Film Unit. The film was a major success: Tony Aldgate comments that it was 'far and away the biggest box office winner of all the "official" British documentaries produced and released during the war'<sup>688</sup>. It won an Oscar for best documentary<sup>689</sup>, and was sufficiently successful in

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<sup>683</sup> *The Times*, 22 April, 1942.

<sup>684</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.1823, 26 March 1942, p.20.

<sup>685</sup> *Motion Picture Herald*, Vol.147, No, 11 April 1942, p.598.

<sup>686</sup> S.P. Mackenzie, *British War Films*, pp.50-51.

<sup>687</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>688</sup> Anthony Aldgate, 'Creative Tensions: *Desert Victory*, the Army Film Unit and Anglo-American Rivalry, 1943-5' in Philip M. Taylor, ed, *Britain and the Cinema in the Second World War*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 144-167, p.144.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*

the States to awaken a certain amount of envy in Hollywood. Churchill himself took an interest in the film and sent copies to both Roosevelt and Stalin<sup>690</sup>.

*Desert Victory* sets up a clear contrast between the British and the Germans. In accordance with the 'People's War' image, the British are depicted as a citizen army; emphasis is placed on its essentially democratic aspect. Service chiefs are seen consulting together; the chain of command ensures that every soldier knows the plan of battle; this is not an Army which blindly obeys orders, it is informed about the intentions and tactics of its commanders. Ordinary German soldiers are never shown as individuals, reflecting the Korda depiction of the 'faceless formations'. German air power is embodied in the Stukas, the much-feared dive-bombers; an early sequence depicts the mechanised might of the Afrika Korps, with emphasis on the advancing tanks. Individual German soldiers only appear if they are prisoners-of-war or dead bodies, neither of which presents a threat to the British forces – they are, in a sense, no longer part of the Nazi formations. The Axis army is personified in its commanding General, later Field Marshal, Rommel. Images of the German commander show him as supreme, alone or surrounded by his subordinate staff: the emphasis is on Rommel, in sole command, in contrast to the British commanders who form a winning team. Unlike the British, Axis forces are part of a dictatorship.

Early on in the film the aim of *Desert Victory* is made plain - 'to destroy the myth of Rommel's invincibility' - which Rommel's defeat in the Alamein campaign obviously succeeded in doing. The commentary and images imply that Rommel is somewhat bombastic, another arrogant, militaristic German: 'He told his troops that this day they were going to Cairo but five days later he withdrew...He left nearly three hundred

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<sup>690</sup> James Chapman, *The British at War*, p.146.



tanks behind to prove his generalship', against shots of destroyed German tanks and vehicles. A subsequent sequence shows a press conference in Berlin, with Rommel full of confidence, a dominant figure informing journalists that 'You may rely on our holding fast to what we've got'. The British commentary goes on to refer to 'one of Hitler's famous intuitions – he saw before him the conqueror of Egypt', as Hitler is shown awarding Rommel a Field Marshal's baton. It is implied that the Germans do not fight cleanly. When the courtesies of war are shown, they are strictly limited to the British side – British soldiers tending the enemy wounded, for example. There is a hint of German 'frightfulness': we are told that the British bury the dead of both sides, but that they have to be very careful burying British corpses because 'the Germans on several occasions had attached booby traps to our men's bodies'. The commentary later suggests that his Italian allies were 'abandoned by Rommel without food or water', a comment which implies that Rommel is unreliable and Germans are not loyal allies.

Critically the film was very well received, being almost universally praised for its authenticity. The *Manchester Guardian* saw it as 'an outstanding achievement'<sup>691</sup>.

Campbell Dixon in the *Daily Telegraph* hailed it as a film which finally did 'justice to the British Army', complaining that previously the British had lagged behind their Russian allies and the German enemy in appreciating the virtues of film propaganda<sup>692</sup>.

A.T. Borthwick called the film 'a wonderful achievement. It is the real thing, with no false heroics and with a discreet, matter-of-fact eloquence in the commentary ... There has never been a film more throbbing with actuality'<sup>693</sup>. The democratic representation of the British was commented on by some of the critics. Both the *Daily Herald*<sup>694</sup> and

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<sup>691</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 18 March 1943.

<sup>692</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 March 1943.

<sup>693</sup> A.T. Borthwick, *News Chronicle*, 4 March 1943.

<sup>694</sup> *Daily Herald*, 5 March 1943.

the *Scotsman*<sup>695</sup> emphasised the British citizen army with the implied contrast with German totalitarianism, while the *Liverpool Post* juxtaposed Churchill's 'personification of sturdy John Bull among the troops [and] Rommel sunning himself in Berlin and receiving his baton at the hands of a flabby Hitler'<sup>696</sup>. British commanders, on the other hand, were portrayed in the desert alongside of and talking to their troops.

*Desert Victory* was never intended to be a detailed study of the Afrika Korps and its commander; it is the story of a great British victory at the end of a year which began with the set-back of the escape of German battle-cruisers from Brest and which had seen Rommel's capture of Tobruk in June. Alamein was the first major British victory against the Wehrmacht: Britain had had its successes at sea – the Battle of the River Plate in 1939, the sinking of the *Bismarck* in May 1941; and in the air – the Battle of Britain in 1940, and later the beginning of major bombing raids on Germany (the first RAF thousand bomber raid had taken place in May 1942); but until El Alamein there had been no comparable success against the German army. The Alamein campaign was a boost for the morale of the Army and for the civilians back home. Pictures of the enemy, when these were required, were limited to what the British could film for themselves, reconstruct, or what was held on captured newsreel, so the lack of depiction of the ordinary German soldier may have been of necessity rather than choice, but this treating of the Germans as a mass reflects their depiction by Korda. The concentration on the single commanding figure of Rommel echoes Hitler's position as the Führer of the German nation. Whether by design or not the film can be seen to put forward the popular stereotype of the Germans which *The Lion Has Wings* exemplified.

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<sup>695</sup> *Scotsman* 7 March 1943.

<sup>696</sup> *Liverpool Post*, 4 March 1943.



What this film could not acknowledge (except indirectly) in the circumstances of the war, was the popularity of Rommel not only in Germany but among the British soldiers who fought against him. In the post-war period, the desert war was often regarded as fought with chivalry on both sides, and Rommel himself provided alternative images of the Germans as an honourable enemy<sup>697</sup>.

While some films drew a clear distinction between Nazis and ordinary Germans, and even acknowledged the existence of active resistance to the Hitler regime, most British films characterised the Germans in terms of the masculine, militaristic, brutal stereotype which had been used during the First World War. However, this characterisation did not accord with the views of the British people, varying numbers of whom, throughout the war, distinguished between Nazis and Germans. The propaganda may have been pervasive in a very popular mass medium, but it did not necessarily always affect or reflect public attitudes.

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<sup>697</sup> Foreward by Field-Marshal Auchinleck in Young, *Rommel*, p.10.

## CHAPTER 5 - POST-WAR CINEMA

British priorities changed with the German surrender in May 1945. From the Germans being the enemy they became an occupied people for whose welfare their occupiers were responsible. Allied Service personnel experienced the change from being welcomed as liberators in the German-occupied countries to being invaders in enemy territory.

Allied policy towards the Germans had been shaped between the three main powers (Britain, the USA and the USSR). Germany was to be divided into three (later four) Zones, each administered by one of the Allies. The Russians were to be responsible for eastern Germany, the Americans for the south west, the British for the north west, and a zone for the French was carved out of the British and American sectors, in the central west of the country. Berlin, although deep within the Russian Zone, was also divided into four sectors, one for each of the Allies. Although the country was to be administered in four separate areas, the initial intention was that Germany would not be divided but remain one entity.

Giles MacDonogh states that 'Germany was to be reformed by the "four Ds": decentralisation, demilitarisation, denazification and democracy'<sup>698</sup>. To some extent this policy was carried out: the separate administrations of the four Allies inevitably led to a certain amount of decentralisation – by the time the Berlin Airlift ended in May 1949, Germany was effectively divided into the Russian East and the other Allies' West. The German Armed Forces were disbanded: in 1945 most German Service personnel became prisoners-of-war and were released over a period of time.

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<sup>698</sup> MacDonogh, p. 7.



Denazification policies were implemented, although with limited effect. Given the pervasiveness of Nazi Party membership – any kind of Government work was almost impossible without a Party card – exclusion of Party members from any form of public life was almost impossible<sup>699</sup>. Democracy was introduced successfully. As a means of achieving these desirable goals the Allies put various policies in place, including a drive to re-educate the Germans into democratic ways and the much criticised ‘non-fraternisation’ policy imposed on British and American troops entering Germany. As has been shown, this policy was unpopular amongst the occupying troops. It seems to have been both a means of bringing home to the German people the enormity of what had been done in their name through a collective ‘sending to Coventry’ and also a security measure; there was considerable concern about the possibility of subversive activities by a German resistance, a threat which never materialised.

As regards the cinema, ‘the received wisdom among film historians has been that in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, film-makers and audiences no longer had an appetite for the subject of war’<sup>700</sup>. As Stephen Guy argues, this is not the case, and films about or relating to the war continued to be made during that post-war period. Films directly concerning the war continued the genres which had been popular before the war or became popular during it, for example the combat film, *Theirs is the Glory* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1946); the Resistance film, *Odette* (Herbert Wilcox, 1951); the spy film, *I See a Dark Stranger* (Frank Launder, 1946). The prisoner-of-war film, a genre which had not been made during the war, was revived, for example *The Captive Heart* (Basil Dearden, 1946). There were also a number of films relating directly or

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<sup>699</sup> See Meehan, pp. 101-3 and 108-111.

<sup>700</sup> Stephen Guy, *After Victory: Projections of the Second World War and its Aftermath in British Feature Films, 1946-1950*, unpublished thesis for Queen Mary College, University of London, 2002, Abstract.

indirectly to British occupation of Germany, for example *Portrait from Life* (Terence Fisher, 1948).

*I See a Dark Stranger* is set during the war (Marcia Landy states that it 'originated during the war'<sup>701</sup>) and tells the story of Bridie Quiltie (Deborah Kerr), a young Irish girl whose head is filled with her father's stories of his exploits in the IRA and who desires to fight the hated English. She is recruited by a German spy, Miller (Raymond Huntley), and goes to England to help him engineer the escape of an important German agent (Pryce) who has obtained the plans for D-Day. She meets a British Army Intelligence officer, David Bayne (Trevor Howard) who is both attracted to her and suspicious of her activities. After various adventures, during which Bridie decides to retire from espionage and falls in love with Bayne, she escapes the British and the Germans and returns to Eire with Bayne's help. After the war, we see them as a newly-married couple.

Bridie's first meeting with Miller indicates she is easily swayed. On her train journey to Dublin she shares her carriage with a stranger, Miller. She whiles away her time noticing his hair and his nice, clean nails, then thinks he is probably English and changes her mind, seeing him as an oppressor, noting the cruel set of his jaw – a nice example of how presumptions can alter perceptions.

The film follows the wartime convention of connecting German espionage activities with the Irish, and suggesting the presence of a German spy network operating under the noses of the British. There is a hint of the connection of Germans with sexual immorality. Miller instructs Bridie to 'use her female wiles' to get close to Bayne.

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<sup>701</sup> Marcia Landy, *British Genres: Cinema and Society, 1930-1960*, Oxford and Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991, p.136.



When she protests that she does not like him, Miller informs her that her personal inclinations do not matter. However, Miller has some admirable qualities. He is resourceful, managing to engineer Pryce's escape. While he ruthlessly exploits Bridie's misplaced desire to fight the English, he shows some signs of regretting the need to do so. Even when dying, his self-control is maintained: having refused a doctor, he gives Bridie the appropriate information and equipment (blank ID cards and money). He even instructs her on how to dispose of his body. He also gives her a photograph, asking her if she is able to do so to tell the lady in it what happened to him: 'Tell her I died for Germany. It will amuse her'.

The other Germans in the film are hardly characterised, they are simply enemy agents. They are shown as brutal, kidnapping Bridie and intending to take her to Germany by U-boat from the Eire coast, but also not very efficient – they are outwitted by Bayne.

While the dangers of careless talk are indicated in a Sergeant's giving of information to Bridie, the moral is not stressed. Much fun is had over Bridie's unrelenting Irishness and the 'quaintness' of her determination to fight the English, and the funeral-smuggling operation. Some tension is built into the plot, especially during the scenes of the disposal of the body, and Bridie's kidnapping and escape. Miller is an exception in being portrayed as serious. Unlike the wartime comedies, where the Germans are shown as inefficient and rather stupid, as in *Let George Do It* (Marcel Varnel, 1940), Miller is permitted to be a dangerous opponent. The film is not broad comedy but a comedy-thriller in the Hitchcock tradition, and indeed Hitchcock's absence as director was regretted by some critics<sup>702</sup>.

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<sup>702</sup> Helen Fletcher, *Sunday Graphic*, 7 July 1946, *Sunday Times*, 7 July 1946, *Manchester Guardian*, 6 July 1946.

Some reviewers enjoyed the film. The *Daily Mail* saw it as a spy story 'having charm and freshness'; 'this film has the elusive thing called atmosphere – and this is sustained, whether the camera is trying to amuse, chill, or merely enchant you with pleasant views of Ireland'<sup>703</sup>. Joan Lester noted that 'Raymond Huntley and the rest of the espionage gang are unpleasant rather than sinister, but certainly more credible than most screen spies...'<sup>704</sup>; Miller was seen as too decent a German to be an effective villain. Others were less enthusiastic. The *Daily Herald* complained that the film lacked 'tautness and suspense', although it was still recommended<sup>705</sup>. The *Daily Telegraph* thought the subject matter rather dubious: 'Whether espionage for Germany should be treated as a girlish indiscretion I leave others to judge'; even a year after the end of the war, some viewers felt that spying against Britain was no cause for levity, although the reviewer considered that 'ideological implications apart' the film was 'a shrewd and lively blend of suspense and comedy'. Raymond Huntley's 'master spy' was 'easily the most effective character', Miller's dying quip was appreciated<sup>706</sup>. Landy states that the film 'was popular with audiences in Britain and the United States'<sup>707</sup>.

Another post-war film which shares many characteristics of the spy film, although it does not quite fall into that category, is *Counterblast* (Paul L. Stein, 1948). It deals with a German operating undercover in Britain, although this time the villain is a rogue scientist, Bruckner (Mervyn Johns), conducting illicit experiments. His escape from a British prisoner-of-war camp is engineered by the familiar sinister, undercover group of German supporters, which includes a dentist, Kennedy (a faint hint of an Irish connection) and an obviously foreign psychoanalyst, Professor Inman (Karel

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<sup>703</sup> *Daily Mail*, 6 July 1946.

<sup>704</sup> Joan Lester, *Reynolds News*, 7 July 1946. '...Hitchcock would have known that any thriller must have one really nasty person', *Time and Tide*, 13 July 1946.

<sup>705</sup> *Daily Herald*, 6 July 1946.

<sup>706</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 8 July 1946.

<sup>707</sup> Landy, *British Genres*, p. 136.



Stepanek). The group intends to explore biological warfare for use by Germany in the future. Bruckner's job is to take the place of a British scientist, Forrester (returning home after many years in Australia) and to develop a vaccine against the plague. With their own people protected, the Germans could use the plague bacillus as a bacteriological weapon. While Bruckner agrees to participate in the plan, his main desire appears to be to escape to South America.

Bruckner manages to take Forrester's place at a British research laboratory and to conclude his experiments successfully, despite having to share his house with an American assistant, Rankin (Robert Beatty), and a young woman from New Zealand, Tracy Shaw (Nova Pilbeam). Rankin becomes suspicious of 'Forrester' and eventually the deception is uncovered. On the run, Bruckner fails to get help from the spy network, Kennedy takes his briefcase and threatens to kill him. At this point, Bruckner is shown in a state of hysterical anger, shouting that the information is in his head, not written down; it is power, and plenty of people would be prepared to pay well for it; any loyalty to the Nazi Party is forgotten in concern for personal advantage. He escapes and stows away aboard a ship, only to be gassed when the vessel is sealed for fumigation.

Bruckner could be seen as a reprise of Johns' sinister German spy in *The Next of Kin*. However, there are distinctions between the wartime and post-war portrayals. The propaganda purposes of the earlier film required the public to be on their guard against the enemy within. In the post-war era, there is still concern about Germans working for a restoration of Nazi rule, but less about spy networks in Britain. The wartime spy appears mild-mannered and passes very easily for an Englishman, but is ruthless and professional, still successfully operating at the end of the film. Bruckner is also shown

as ruthless: his murder of Forrester and successful disposal of the latter's body; his killing of Martha (Sybilla Binder), his German 'housekeeper' and contact; his using of Tracy as a guinea pig for his experiments; his murder (by lethal injection) of an injured German prisoner-of-war because the captive argues against Hitler.

However, he never easily passes as an Englishman. While none of the characters (except Rankin) doubt his identity, they all note that he is 'odd': for Mrs. Plum (Gladys Henson) he is always complaining, not a proper gentleman; he loses his temper with Rankin when the latter comes in early from an evening out intending to share a drink with him – Bruckner's remark here about not being in the habit of joking seems an oblique reference to the notorious German lack of humour; he has no hobbies (unlike his fellow scientists). He acts like a dictatorial father when Tracy returns late with Rankin from a Golf Club dance: 'You're just a cheap little... You'd better go to your room'. While the wartime spy has no personal ties or empathy for those he works amongst, Bruckner is less detached. He seems to fall in love with Tracy, and when Martha orders him to kill her, he kills Martha instead. He has in his possession an 'aerosol bomb', and one scene while he is on the run shows him in an Underground train, fingering the device and looking around at his fellow passengers, including a woman with a baby. He appears to be considering using it, but does not. Is he moved by common humanity, as his gaze at the mother and child might indicate, or is he restrained by concerns for his own safety? The scene is open to either interpretation. While there is no doubting the wartime spy's devotion to the Nazi regime, Bruckner seems motivated more by concern for his own safety, although his killing of the prisoner-of-war might indicate his dislike of those who change their loyalties.



The film was largely ignored by the critics. The *Daily Herald* dismissed it in a very brief comment: 'Mad German scientist prepares germ weapons for the next war. Too long and none too convincing'<sup>708</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* was rather more complimentary, seeing the story as 'not only topical, but ...also ...rather disturbingly plausible', and praised Mervyn Johns 'dramatic ability'. It thought there were unconvincing elements in the plot: 'One wonders...if such a ruthlessly calculating character [Bruckner] would make the many obvious slips which lead Rankin to the discovery of his sinister machinations'<sup>709</sup>. *Kine Weekly* was fairly enthusiastic, seeing it as 'built on solid rather than imaginative stage lines', and also praised Mervyn Johns. While speculating that the public may have 'gone a little stale' on Nazi spies, it noted the points of appeal as 'Popularity of espionage fiction, good thrills, realistic technical presentation, salutary and exciting finale, attractive title and cast', and thought it a 'good popular booking'<sup>710</sup>. *Today's Cinema* thought it a 'far-fetched story' which 'harks back to familiar war-time theme concerning spies in our midst and contains its full share of implausibilities, but also moments of genuine suspense and excitement ... and, in this case, making ready for the next Nazi revival and the bacterial war into which...they intend to plunge the world'. It is 'unpretentious thriller entertainment aimed exclusively at popular appreciation...'. Mervyn Johns performance was 'conscientiously baleful' as 'the determined little German, though he is certainly not everyone's idea of the more fanatical type of Nazi'<sup>711</sup>, which suggests the reviewer had a blonde *übermensch* in mind. The Nazi spy genre was now out of date; spy films of the 1950s and 1960s had either Communists or pseudo-Communists as the enemy.

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<sup>708</sup> *Daily Herald*, 11 June 1948.

<sup>709</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.15, No.175, 1 July 1948, p.91.

<sup>710</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.2143, 27 May 1948, p.16.

<sup>711</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.70, No.5650, 21 May 1947, pp.9-10.

While there is no sign of the film's being popular and it has been ignored in the literature, it is an interesting subject. The contrast in portrayals by Mervyn Johns of the wartime and post-war spy is instructive, as is the raising of the fear of bacteriological warfare. An early scene in the film, between Bruckner and a clergyman he meets during his journey to Gillington provides a short debate about the horrors of germ warfare. The clergyman objects strongly to it, but Bruckner counters with, 'What about the atomic bomb?'. The Vicar is forced to agree that it is not the weapons but war that is inhumane. The two views are explicitly juxtaposed in the dialogue: faith against forensic medicine, dogma against science and 'penicillin against prayer', to quote Bruckner. This conversation stresses the dark side of scientific discovery, something of which the post-war public was well aware: the dropping of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki had shocked many. The scene also sets up the familiar contrast between the Christian, decent British and the atheistic German.

*Theirs is the Glory* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1946) is a factual reconstruction of the operation at Arnhem in September 1944. The film deals with the run-up to the airborne landings and then gives a day-by-day account of the British action until the remaining troops were evacuated across the Rhine following the failure to secure the Arnhem bridge. The film was popular: Josh Billings regards it as the best full-length documentary of its year<sup>712</sup> and Sue Harper notes that it was a runaway hit at the Regent, Portsmouth with a weekly attendance of 21,542<sup>713</sup>.

As the opening captions to the film explain, it used neither studio sets nor actors.

'Every incident was either experienced or witnessed by the people who appeared on the

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<sup>712</sup> Josh Billings, *Kinematograph Weekly*, No. 2070, 19 December 1946, p.47.

<sup>713</sup> Sue Harper, 'Fragmentation and Crisis', p.375.



film`; those who participated in the landing at Arnhem returned once the war was over to re-enact `their gallantry`, a gallantry which was `admitted even by the enemy`.

In its portrayal of a glorious British defeat it has something in common with films about the Dunkirk evacuation, although in its depictions of the German and British forces it echoes *Desert Victory*. The Germans are never shown as individuals, except if they are dead or captured. British personnel are individualised, shots of individual faces are frequently shown, and the film follows the actions of a few men in some detail. Private Holt, for example, is separated from his comrades on landing. We first see him caught by his parachute in a tree, then follow his actions as he frees himself and drops to the ground; he recurs at various points in the film as he attaches himself to other units while trying to get back to his own. Stanley Maxted, a Canadian BBC war correspondent, provides a commentary of what is happening through the device of his reporting back to his employers. As is typical of wartime documentaries, the film shows men from both the Home Counties and other parts of the British Isles, and other ranks feature as well as officers. The final sequence of the film shows a Nissen hut with empty beds, the occupants not having returned, but there is no suggestion that they have died in vain: the emphasis is on the bravery with which they fought, and how their action led to the `saving [of] countless other lives`, although how is not revealed. The righteousness of the cause for which those ordinary men fought (the fact that they are `ordinary men` is emphasised in the commentary) is made clear in an early sequence of a religious service. The padre talks about the coming battle as the camera pans over the men`s faces. In his sermon the padre mentions that they are `God`s instruments and are called to right grievous wrongs`. There is thus the familiar implication that the Allies are decent Christian people in contrast to the godless German barbarians.

Early shots contrast peaceful pre-war Arnhem with the ruin that the town now is, and the graves of British soldiers are shown. The British are welcomed by Dutch civilians (mainly women), which emphasises the hated nature of German occupation. A later sequence in the Tafelberg hotel, used as a hospital, shows British doctors and Dutch nurses working side by side to help the British wounded: one shot through a window shows a German sentry walking up and down – the Germans capture the wounded but do not help them, and are outsiders, excluded from the friendly co-operation between the Allied nations.

The commentary details how the lightly-armed British were fighting ‘against the heavy weapons of the Huns’, Huns rather than the more familiar and friendly ‘Jerry’. Shots of the German opposition frequently show tanks fighting the British, heavy metal monsters threatening to crush vulnerable flesh<sup>714</sup>; however, German tanks are shown as vulnerable to British anti-tank guns. Similarly a German artillery post in a pillbox is ‘taken out’ by a British portable flame-thrower.

German prisoners are characterised as ‘insolent SS man from crack units, dazed men from local defence units and a few bewildered clerks and cooks’. There is thus an association made between the more efficient German fighters and the Nazis – crack units are ‘SS’. The mention of ‘dazed men...and a few bewildered clerks and cooks’ makes clear that not all the German opposition consists of heavily armed units, in contrast to the general portrayal of the enemy which concentrates on German tanks.

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<sup>714</sup> These aspects were noted by the reviewers. For the overwhelming odds the British paratroopers faced, see Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 12 September 1946. For the contrast between lightly-armed British and mechanised Germans, and the lack of characterisation of the German soldiers see *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September 1946, and Helen Fletcher, *Sunday Graphic*, 15 September 1946.



On day 6 of the operation, when things are already going badly wrong, an officer endeavours to raise the morale of his men. The British have fought German troops in North Africa, Sicily and Italy: 'They were not up to us then and they're not up to us now'. This suggests that even after the successful D Day landings there was still concern amongst officers about the belief that the Germans were invincible. However, the film shows no evidence of lack of morale: a German loudspeaker vehicle offering the British a chance to surrender and save their lives is met by a chorus of wolf-whistles and shouts, and, when the vehicle is shot at and explodes, the men laugh – the film focuses on one man's wry smile.

The critics were enthusiastic about the film. *Today's Cinema* described it as a 'vivid and inspiring re-enactment of ...[the] gallant expedition to Arnhem', containing 'relentlessly realistic war action and spectacle, but dominating as unforgettable epic of courage and heroism of the simple British soldier... a magnificent piece of reconstruction, complete with all the ghastly horrors of modern warfare marching in step with the sublimity of the human individual fighting desperately for a cause in which he believes'; for this reviewer the concentration on the individuals was effective<sup>715</sup>. *Kine Weekly* also praised the film stressing how: 'depicted in thrilling detail by surviving officers and men, it is not only history, but sublime drama. Every exhibitor is conscience-bound to present the picture, which should not miss a single screen'. The reviewer also queries the A certificate: 'If we had our way it would be shown to children, until the futility, as well as the glory, of war is finally brought home'<sup>716</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* thought it 'a film which is authentic documentary in atmosphere', but added the caveat that it 'depends much on the remembered tension of

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<sup>715</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.69, No.5383, 16 August 1946, p.13.

<sup>716</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No. 2053, 22 August 1946, pp. 21-22.

those Arnhem days for its drama'<sup>717</sup>. The *New Statesman* noted: 'This is not one of the ordinary run of films... Those who made it have done justice to the men whose heroism they have recorded'<sup>718</sup>. Leonard Mosley headed his review, 'The Glory that was Arnhem'. He wrote: 'This film...has stirred me as no other has ever done ... it is an emotional and violent film'<sup>719</sup>. Fred Majdalany called it 'the most moving film I have ever seen', and mentioned that it would have 'a special command performance at Balmoral'. Although he concentrated on the display of British valour, he also saw a wider message: 'Here is the answer to those who remember the war but forget the soldier. For this is not merely the story of Arnhem. It is the deathless story of the common soldier of all countries, in all wars, of all times'<sup>720</sup>.

While the film was generally praised, some critics noted the particular documentary method used, reconstruction. For the *Manchester Guardian*, reconstruction posed no difficulties. While this was not 'a film of a battle like *Desert Victory*', the critic argued the directors 'has made ... a monument to soldiers – not as so many pawns in a gigantic game but as individuals, dogged, hungry, outgunned, beaten'<sup>721</sup>. For Dilys Powell, however, the reconstruction diminished the film: she missed 'the very presence of history' which she felt when watching films such as *Desert Victory*. She still found *Theirs is the Glory* 'admirable and sometimes moving'<sup>722</sup>.

The degree to which the film is still rooted in wartime attitudes to the enemy can be demonstrated when it is compared with Richard Attenborough's 1977 film, *A Bridge Too Far*, based on Cornelius Ryan's best-selling book. Unlike the 1946 film, which

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<sup>717</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.13, No.154, 1 October 1946, p. 135.

<sup>718</sup> *New Statesman*, 21 September 1946.

<sup>719</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 12 September 1946.

<sup>720</sup> Fred Majdalany, *Daily Mail*, 12 September 1946.

<sup>721</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 September, 1946.

<sup>722</sup> Dilys Powell, *The Sunday Times*, 15 September 1946.



dealt solely with the British action at Arnhem, the 1977 Anglo-US production covered the whole of Operation Market Garden, including the capture of two other bridges, successfully carried out by American troops. The mood of the latter film is very different from that of *Theirs is the Glory* where it was implied that if the operation was a tragic, if glorious, failure, it paved the way for later success. From the very earliest moments of *A Bridge Too Far*, in Liv Ullman's (playing Kate Ter Horst) opening voiceover, the operation is depicted as doomed to failure: she refers to the squabbling between Eisenhower's generals, Montgomery and Patton, and to the Allies' attempt to bring the boys home for Christmas. This, combined with later footage of General Browning's refusal to reconsider the plan despite evidence that British Airborne will encounter far firmer resistance than is anticipated, evokes memories of the First World War, always a site for British anti-war sentiments. The film is unequivocally about a military failure – American success at Grave and Nijmegen is negated by the failure to capture the final bridge across the Rhine which would give the Allies access to the Ruhr and the heart of Germany's war manufacturing. The imagery is of the pain suffered equally by both sides, and by the unfortunate civilians trapped in the middle. The film begins with Kate Ter Horst, and ends with a sequence showing her and her children leaving their devastated home, through the newly-dug graves of British soldiers. The final shot shows the little family walking along a dyke, dragging their possessions in a handcart. The scene is almost medieval. If it is impossible to make an anti-war film about the Second World War, Attenborough here comes very close to it<sup>723</sup>. Anti-war sentiments were very much alive in the late 1960s and early 1970s, triggered both by the explosion of demonstrations against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s and also by ongoing fears of the devastating consequences of a nuclear confrontation between the superpowers.

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<sup>723</sup> Philip French's review in *The Times*, 24 June 1977, suggests that this is an anti-war film, likely therefore to disappoint the audience for 'big-budget combat pictures'.

In contrast to *Theirs is the Glory*, where the Germans are treated as the enemy *en masse*, not as individuals, they play a much greater role in *A Bridge Too Far*. The view from the other side is given. The first sight of them is of a retreating army, with blank, tired faces, using any transport available from feet to fire engines. They are rallied by Field Marshal von Rundstedt (Wolfgang Preiss), who is given a cynical sense of humour. Asked by his staff what they should do he shocks them by suggesting, 'End the war'. When they respond that he has never lost a battle the elderly Field Marshal ripostes: 'I'm still young – give me time', and wags his finger at them.

Little cameos establish the German soldier as human: the young soldier who responds to the plea of the Resistance leader's son to let him through a road block to visit his girlfriend; the terrified middle-aged soldier who creeps into a glider, only to find its occupants dead and the plans for the campaign available for the taking; the soldier who tries to rescue another from a burning tank, only to be shot in the process.

The main German characters are three commanders, Field Marshal Model, (Walter Kohut), and Generals Ludwig (Hardy Kruger) and Bittrich (Maximilian Schell).

Model, always shown in connection with a meal (at the dining table, giving Bittrich tea, offering Ludwig a choice of 'white wine or red'), has an exaggerated sense of his own importance, believing the attack on Arnhem is directed at him. He is also militarily incompetent, intent on preserving the bridges for a counter-attack which his subordinates are well aware cannot be mounted. He could be seen as the typical stupid German. Ludwig and Bittrich are agreed that the operation is directed at the bridges and that these must be blown, in defiance of their superior's orders. The two generals are contrasted. Ludwig, clad in black, is a fluent English speaker. However, he is a ruthless man, refusing to allow a ceasefire to evacuate the British wounded, 'there is a battle and we are in the process of winning', waiting to blow the Nijmegen bridge until the first tanks cross it (the explosives fail to detonate). Bittrich in field-grey uniform is



depicted as a more complex man. He has a friendly, if formal, relationship with his subordinates (his conversation with his aide as he watches the British planes fly over). He offers to accept a British surrender when it is clear that the troops at the bridge cannot hold out, an offer which they refuse. However, he then issues the order to 'flatten Arnhem'. Later he agrees to a ceasefire to allow the British wounded to be evacuated to German hospitals, overruling Ludwig. Finally, he goes to the bridge to salute the commander of the British unit there and to offer him a small gift, a bar of chocolate dropped by the RAF. He even tries out a word or two of English for Frost's (Anthony Hopkins) benefit.

The treatment of the Germans in *A Bridge Too Far* reflects a change in attitude which had occurred during the period since the end of the war, a change which began in the early 1950s. The enemy is given a face and some equivalence is shown between the suffering of the ordinary soldier on both sides – the weary, apathetic retreating German troops at the beginning of the film a mirror of the British contingent at the end. The Germans at Arnhem reflect three stereotyped views: the stupid glutton (Model); the ruthless Nazi (Ludwig); and the good German (Bittrich). Bittrich behaves as an honourable enemy, maybe harsh in battle, but humane in victory. The little cameo of Von Rundstedt shows both the formality of the Germans in contrast to the more informal relations between Allied officers, but also a German with a sense of humour. The film was moderately successful, but no epic-scale war films were made after it until the 1990s, the genre was perceived to have lost its popularity. The film left critics divided and caused considerable controversy about its portrayal of history, judging both by some of the reviews and the correspondence pages of *The Times*.

Another genre which continued after the war was the Resistance film. *Against the Wind* (Charles Crichton) was an early post-war example, being released in 1947. It depicts an operation in Belgium to rescue a key Resistance figure from the Germans.

Five agents are involved, one of whom, Max, is a traitor, selling secrets to the Germans in return for money. His contact is an Irish girl, another Bridie; thus the link between Nazi German and the Irish republic, based on hatred of the English, is maintained.

The film has little to say about the Germans. They need no characterisation apart from fleeting incidents, for example the young soldier who accosts Emile, but only wants a light for his cigarette; or the group of soldiers manning a checkpoint who stop Emile and demand his papers. When, in his confusion, he drops a number of tin cans which roll away down the street, they laugh at his discomfiture but then help him retrieve his property, forgetting to check his papers.

The film thus continues wartime depictions. The Germans are the enemy, an ever-present threat, at least in the occupied countries, but of no interest as individuals – a vivid cinematic representation of collective guilt. The film also makes no attempt to deal with the complexities of occupation. The Belgians are divided firmly into Quislings who work with the Germans and the remainder of the population who are strongly anti-German. During the car chase as the rescue party and Andrew escape, the German pursuit is heavily hampered by ordinary people who deliberately delay the occupier. The only difference from a war-time film is that the traitor-spy, Max, is corrupted by cash, he is not a German; he even prefers the British way of life. However he is not a British turncoat – his lack of firm national allegiance is made clear.

The critics were divided about the merits of the film. There was concern that the genre was over-exposed<sup>724</sup>. The *Sunday Times* saw a change in attitude in the audience:

'*Against the Wind* assumes partiality in an audience which already less than three years

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<sup>724</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 15, No.171, 1 March 1948, p.28. This concern was expressed by the critic of the *Daily Mail*, 13 February 1948, the *Observer*, 15 February 1948, and the *Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1948.



after the end of the war is beginning to find detachment<sup>725</sup>. For this critic simple hatred of the Germans as the enemy could not be relied on from a cinema audience. Reg Whitley, however, considered that there was an opening for war films.

‘Personally, I think there is a market now for the adventurous type of war yarn, especially if the grim side is played down. Several of our producers feel the same way about it, and have decided to “have a go”’<sup>726</sup>.

The casting of Jack Warner as a traitor also raised doubts, summed up by Ewart Hodges: ‘there’s something crassly wrong about casting Jack Warner as a traitor – “He just hasn’t got the face”’<sup>727</sup>. It would seem that casting ‘against type’ did not work. One might expect that an actor like Jack Warner in the role of a traitor would make the audience think a traitor could be the apparently genial ‘man-next-door’; however for some Warner’s *persona* was so well-established that it was impossible to accept him in any other role. For some critics, portrayal of the Germans as inefficient and/or stupid did not add to the merits of the film<sup>728</sup>.

Otherwise the critics were divided between those who saw the film as an enjoyable adventure story, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and those who considered it poor. *Monthly Film Bulletin* thought it ‘quite an exciting film after a rather slow start’<sup>729</sup>; for the *Daily Telegraph* it was ‘an interesting if not always convincing picture of the brave men and women who parachuted into Occupied countries’<sup>730</sup>. Reg Whitley described it as ‘a first-class thriller’<sup>731</sup>, while Elspeth Grant ‘would not have missed it – and I don’t

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<sup>725</sup> *Sunday Times*, 15 February 1948.

<sup>726</sup> Reg Whitley, *Daily Mirror*, 13 February 1948.

<sup>727</sup> Ewart Hodges, *News of the World*, 15 February 1948; see also *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.15, No.171, 1 March 1948, p.28; *Kine Weekly*, No.2129, 19 February 1948, p.19.

<sup>728</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1 March 1948; *Today’s Cinema* Vol.70, No.5609, 13 February 1948, p.13; *News Chronicle*, 14 February 1948.

<sup>729</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, 1 March 1948.

<sup>730</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 1948.

<sup>731</sup> Reg Whitley, *Daily Mirror*, 13 February 1948.

think you should either<sup>732</sup>; *Reynolds News* saw it as having 'terrifying authenticity'<sup>733</sup>, while the *Sunday Times* thought it 'one of the better Resistance films'<sup>734</sup>.

On the other hand, the *Manchester Guardian* thought the film 'just another lurid fantasy' which failed to 'do justice to that queer, secretive business of fighting the enemy in plain clothes'. The critic considered the film 'too crowded with authentic details as well as exciting events'<sup>735</sup>. For *The Times* 'the film fails to engage and hold our attention'<sup>736</sup>, while the *News Chronicle* thought 'the action...does not bear examination'<sup>737</sup>. The trade press were indifferent to the film. For *Today's Cinema*: 'Conventional direction, earnest portrayal, meritorious production qualities. Acceptable for indulgent or juvenile patronage'<sup>738</sup>. For *Kine Weekly* it was 'spectacular but far-fetched espionage romantic melodrama...a moderate British booking; ...excessive detail complicates the story and hinders the action...' <sup>739</sup>. There is little evidence that the film was particularly successful; at the Regent, Portsmouth, it was a moderate success, achieving an audience figure of 13, 449<sup>740</sup>.

Herbert Wilcox's 1950 film, *Odette*, avoids many of the criticisms directed at *Against the Wind*. The German characters are fleshed out and are not stupid. Odette (Anna Neagle) and her fellow agents are believable. The film is based on true events, as the opening sequence, featuring Maurice Buckmaster himself, emphasises. The film portrays Odette as an ordinary wife and mother, a loyal Frenchwoman married to but separated from an Englishman. She makes considerable sacrifices when she agrees to

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<sup>732</sup> Elspeth Grant, *Sunday Graphic*, 15 February 1948.

<sup>733</sup> *Reynolds News*, 15 February 1948.

<sup>734</sup> *Sunday Times*, 15 February 1948.

<sup>735</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 14 February 1948.

<sup>736</sup> *The Times*, 16 February 1948.

<sup>737</sup> *News Chronicle*, 14 February 1948.

<sup>738</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.70, No.5609, 13 February 1948, p.13.

<sup>739</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.2129, 19 February 1948, p.19.

<sup>740</sup> Harper, 'Fragmentation and Crisis', p.393.



work for SOE, separation from her children who are placed in boarding school, on top of the obvious dangers of the life she embarks upon.

The film follows Odette's activities in France (for which she was awarded the George Cross) and shows her interaction with her colleagues, in particular Captain Peter Churchill (Trevor Howard), and Arnaud (Peter Ustinov) who we are informed at the beginning of the film was captured and shot by the Germans in 1944. Scenes in Marseilles indicate the dangers Odette faces: a shot of her walking down some steps near the station reveals the number of men in uniform, both German and Vichy, around. Having picked up a case containing important plans, she is recommended to stay at the Hôtel du Paradis – a brothel, full of German soldiers, many of whom are deserters. A tense sequence begins with the sound of marching feet and then a shot of a platoon of soldiers outside in the dark street. Odette hears a knock on her room door and German voices demanding that she open it. Madame appears, telling the soldiers that the occupant has scarlet fever, and they leave her alone. A man is arrested in the house – one assumes one of the German deserters - and is dragged off rather roughly, he ends up falling down the stairs. On her way to deliver the case, Odette is stopped at a checkpoint.

The main German character is an enigmatic Intelligence man known as Henri (Marius Goring). Our first sight of him is of a man with tinted glasses making a telephone call. In the background we see a young blonde woman typing. He asks her for the Buckmaster file; the command is in English, at first she does not understand. He addresses a somewhat ambiguous remark to her: 'Your English is bad but you are a very good [slight pause] secretary', a hint that the relationship between them is rather more than officer and typist.

So far, with the exception of Henri, the German characters play the role they did in *Against the Wind*, an ever-present background threat, brutal occupiers and dangerous to those who oppose them. However, the film goes on to show more of Henri. A sequence shows him playing the piano, lamenting 'What a pity Herr Hitler does not like Mendelssohn'. He then plays Chopin. In the background, his 'secretary' is lounging back in an armchair listening. Her relaxed attitude and the rather controversial comments which he makes to her confirm that the relationship between them is an intimate one: this appears to be the familiar linking of Germans with sexual immorality – and to classical music, but in this case that of a German Jew (Mendelssohn) and a Polish patriot (Chopin), neither likely to appeal to the Nazi hierarchy. The conversation makes clear that Henri is a Colonel in the Abwehr (in his words, the equivalent of the British M.I.5), and that there is some question of the 'liquidation' of certain people. He dismisses the matter: 'It's about time Keitel told the Corporal that the Abwehr is not a murder organisation. We leave that to the Gestapo. I hate war, it interrupts my music'. The film thus establishes Henri as an anti-Nazi, but a member of the German Armed Forces. His personal distaste for Nazi methods and prejudices is also indicated. He is perhaps intended to be seen as a sensitive man – his love of music, his dislike of the war. However, there is no indication that he is not an efficient Intelligence officer. A later scene shows that he has one of Churchill's group, Jules, as an informant.

We see a meeting between Odette and Henri. He calls her by her codename, Lise. When she protests he is mistaken, he gently tells her he thinks not. He is open about who he is, and informs her, 'Personally I hold no allegiance to the Nazis', there is a large gulf between the military and Hitler. He seems to be holding out some form of peace feeler, telling Odette that he wants to contact Buckmaster, asking her if she can get him a radio set and a code so that they can begin negotiations. If successful he



wants Buckmaster to send a plane so he (Henri) can go to London. Henri has a note written by another group member, Paul, who is in Fresnes prison and suggests that Odette send someone there under safe conduct to check with Paul that the note is not written under duress. She agrees to send Jules, and asks Arnaud to send a report to London. However, when Jules returns, confirming the truth of the note, she becomes suspicious of his questions.

Odette and Churchill are arrested. Henri informs them that the territory is occupied by 'our allies, the Italians', and offers them a choice – they can be prisoners of the Germans or the Italians. Churchill is in no doubt, 'Italians, chum, wouldn't you?' While prisoners of the Italians, Churchill tries to escape and is badly beaten. We are then shown Henri ordering the transfer of the prisoners to German custody. 'See that they arrive in good health'. In the background is the secretary, beautifully dressed.

A number of scenes show Odette and Churchill in a German prison. The German female prison warder is big, burly, dark and brusque. The cell in which Odette is imprisoned is bare, dark and dirty looking, with the shape of a cross in the grime on the wall. Henri arrives, with the warder protesting to him, words he silences with a gesture. In the cell he offers Odette a cigarette, which she refuses, she does not smoke. He tells her he had to have her arrested to save her from the Gestapo. She need not stay in prison if she helps him; he wishes to contact her friends, Arnaud and Roger. He even offers a night out, a Mozart concert and a meal at a good restaurant: 'I impose no conditions'. She refuses: 'But I do'. At the door he turns to her: 'Lise, I don't want you to go to the Gestapo'. She is not to be bought, 'Enjoy your concert, Henri'.

Henri goes on to talk to Churchill, held in the same prison. He offers him a cigarette with a smile, and tells him that Arnaud and the rest of the cell have been arrested.

Henri suggests an exchange, Churchill for Hess. He tells Churchill he really does hate

the Nazis, and maybe a way could be found to end 'all this misery'. Churchill does not think so, but Henri persists, 'Don't you think it worth trying?'. Churchill dismisses the idea: 'You try, Henri, I'm tired'.

Odette is tortured but refuses to reveal any information. She is tried and condemned to death, and receives a final visit from Henri. He is in confessional mode: 'Will you believe me when I say how sorry, how utterly ashamed I am...I had nothing to do with this'; she responds that she believes him. He continues, 'Lise, it's the Gestapo, it's not my fault. I am not responsible'. She attacks him, stating that he is as much a part of this as any Nazi, 'do not say I am not responsible'. He echoes her words to her interrogators: 'I have nothing to say. Is there anything I can do for you?'. She asks that if Churchill is at headquarters the following morning, could he arrange for her to see him, and not to tell him she has been condemned to death. Henri agrees: 'He will not hear it from me'. She then, perhaps a little contemptuously, asks him to arrange to have her dirty blouse washed, thrusting the garment into his hands.

Another sympathetic German character is a priest, Father Paul. He meets Odette before her interrogation, when he shows her kindness and sympathy: 'There is little I can do to comfort you in here, but what I can I will do'. At this point a guard comes in yelling 'Tribunal' to her. Father Paul tells her this is the Gestapo. With a meaningful look at her he says: 'God bless you my child and give you strength'. He sees her again after her interrogation, and expresses his shock at her condition: 'My child, what have they done to you?'. She asks him not to tell Churchill what the Gestapo did, she is worried the other will do something rash. She also asks him if he can say Mass. He fears not, 'my duties are to comfort the dying, and bury the dead'. She cries out, with reference to the Gestapo: 'Are they so afraid of God?'.



Odette is transferred to Ravensbruck concentration camp. This is depicted in the conventional way, with barbed wire, women walking around in striped, pyjama-like uniforms, even an orchestra of inmates playing as new prisoners enter. Odette is put in solitary confinement, half-starved and generally ill-treated. She is not, however, executed, her story of being the wife of a relative of Winston Churchill's appears to be believed.

On her arrival, she is called to the Kommandant's office. He is a large, fat man in uniform, who informs her she will be put in solitary confinement until the sentence of death is carried out. As she leaves the Kommandant and his officers joke about Churchill. One notes that he is supposed to speak fifteen languages. The Kommandant doubts it, he cannot even say Nazi, 'Narzee'. 'When we get him, no privileges, no cognac, no cigars'. They all laugh. The Kommandant is aware of the dangers of his position should the war go badly. One scene shows him murmuring to his subordinate, 'Have you ever thought what will happen to us if Germany loses the war'. Told that Odette has collapsed due to punishment treatment, he shows his anxiety, 'you have not let her die?'. When the end of the war is near, the Kommandant and the female guard who has treated her so badly both try to use Odette to aid their own survival. The guard grovels, begging 'Frau Churchill' to help her, asking her what she should do. Odette is unmoved. Finally the Kommandant takes her to the Americans, hoping to use her as a guarantee of his own safety; he is arrested as a wanted man.

The film draws some distinction between Germans and Nazis. Henri is an ambiguous character: it is never clear to the viewer (or to Odette) whether he genuinely wishes to establish some form of contact with London with a view to making peace overtures or whether this is just a ploy to infiltrate the network. He appears to hold Odette in high regard, and to wish to keep her from harm. However, he captures and imprisons her and is unable or unwilling to protect her from the Gestapo; Odette herself accuses him

of being unable to avoid responsibility, a comment with which he seems to agree. He is a much more sympathetic and fully-rounded character than any German character in *Against the Wind*. As so often in British films, a German is associated with a love of classical music and sexual immorality. He is depicted as anti-Nazi. Father Paul seems to be honest and good, trying his best to bring what comfort he can to those in prison. The other Germans are either soldiers or else members of the Gestapo. The latter are shown as cruel brutes in the torture scene where they apply a red-hot poker to Odette's back, apparently with no compunction whatsoever. The guards in the prison are rough and off-hand; the guard at Ravensbruck seems to delight in tormenting Odette. The Kommandant is cruel. Both the latter try to use Odette to avoid the consequences of their brutal treatment of prisoners.

The critics were divided about the merits of *Odette*, although agreed that the story was a noble one and worth the telling. It was seen as a good, but not a great picture by some<sup>741</sup>. The *Daily Worker* saw that 'its heroic story is...a credit to the British film industry' (previously criticised for being 'occupied with trivialities'). However the critic had both an ideological objection to the film in that 'it suggests that the French Resistance Movement was organised by a British major in Baker Street and its activities carried out under the leadership of British agents' - aggrieved, perhaps, that the contribution to the French Resistance of the French Communist Party was not acknowledged – and saw the acting of the leading players as 'too theatrical' in the case of Marius Goring and 'too wooden' of Trevor Howard<sup>742</sup>. The critic of *Reynolds News* found the earlier part of the film difficult to accept 'though I knew it to be true', finding Anna Neagle 'unmistakeably British and Miss Neagle, in spite of deglamorization'. Her performance during the prison scenes was considered 'moving ... probably the

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<sup>741</sup> See Milton Shulman in the *Evening Standard*, 8 June 1950, *Sunday Express* 11 June 1950, *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1950.

<sup>742</sup> *Daily Worker*, 10 June 1950.



best she has done...'. Herbert Wilcox's direction was seen as lacking 'the touch of inspiration...but it has accuracy, sincerity and good taste, qualities not in any common currency'<sup>743</sup>. Dilys Powell considered the film 'among the best...yet made about Europe under the German Occupation'. However, she criticised the matching of 'truth with fiction', disliking 'some of the scenes for which there can be no reliable authority', including some with the Kommandant of Ravensbruck<sup>744</sup>. C.A. Lejeune also had reservations. While appreciating Anna Neagle's efforts at realism in her depiction of Odette and her suffering in prison, she felt that the performance had its infelicities: 'if she cannot always pull out a great performance, that is because her powers of apprehension exceed her training in exposition'. She also criticised 'awkward and flat-footed script-writing', and Herbert Wilcox, who, she considered, 'treated the story of Odette more as a matter of historical record than a chance for imaginative film-making'<sup>745</sup>. William Whitebait also praised with reservations: '...horrors apart, the familiar outline of the spy thriller was there, even down to its love story and its happy ending. In the circumstances the film *Odette* does very well not to engulf itself in treacly conventionality'. He also liked Neagle's performance - 'her adventure moves us at times to tears'. However he concluded: 'A better director than Mr. Herbert Wilcox might have brought us here an overwhelming vision. But our better directors don't attempt such themes', echoing the *Daily Worker*'s criticism of British avoidance of serious subjects<sup>746</sup>. The *Manchester Guardian* also felt that the film missed its target: 'This is not the sort of film which will be remembered as a great job of filmcraft; but it will have its honourable place in the record as a simple and convincing document'<sup>747</sup>. For *The People*, 'take away the fact that it's a real life story and look on it as an evening's entertainment you have paid for, and I think you'll be

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<sup>743</sup> *Reynolds News*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>744</sup> Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>745</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>746</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 17 June 1950.

<sup>747</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1950.

disappointed<sup>748</sup>. The most critical review came from *Monthly Film Bulletin*. The reviewer complained that 'a great part of its footage is given up to the relatively uninteresting espionage activities. These are portrayed with a certain *Boy's Own Paper* gusto and crudity'. The 'stilted script' was noted. In particular:

The prison sequences again trust to convention – the Germans are represented as brutal thugs, or suave, sinister villains, and it is hard to believe in such details as the inhuman wardress, who breaks down and grovels to Odette at the Americans' approach ... the total effect is artificial<sup>749</sup>.

Other critics enjoyed the film. The *Sunday Pictorial* thought it 'magnificent', praising Anna Neagle who 'does not give a "performance"...she "lives" the part'. It is 'a film with dignity and strength...Excellent'<sup>750</sup>. The *Daily Mirror* also praised the film: 'It is well acted and brilliantly produced...This is a world beater. Do not miss it'<sup>751</sup>. For Jympson Harman the film was 'powerfully gripping and extracts the last ounce of emotion out of each situation without descending to sensationalism. The scenes where Odette is tortured by the Gestapo would be unbearable if they were not presented in such good taste'<sup>752</sup>. The *News of the World* also thought the film worthwhile: 'Herbert Wilcox has had the wisdom to build *Odette* on the solid foundations of restrained realism, eschewing the glamour and phoney heroism Hollywood would probably have employed with such a story', while Anna Neagle's performance was 'the greatest triumph of her career'<sup>753</sup>. Paul Dehn had helped to train Odette, and thought Wilcox and Neagle's record 'had given me scant sign of the intellectual stature needed to transfer this terrible story to the screen'. However, he was won over by the end result. 'Mr. Wilcox's sound sense emerges in his unswerving obedience, throughout the

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<sup>748</sup> *The People*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>749</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.17, No.198, 1 July 1950, p.101.

<sup>750</sup> *Sunday Pictorial*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>751</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 9 June 1950.

<sup>752</sup> Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 7 June 1950.

<sup>753</sup> *News of the World*, 11 June 1950.



picture, to the real Odette's technical advice; in his painstaking location trips, which have set the piece authentically against its actual background....but also of Colonel Maurice Buckmaster...who most professionally plays his endearing and efficient self<sup>754</sup>. Whatever the critics' views may have been, the film pleased the British public, *Odette* being one of five British films that were 'remarkable money-spinners' in 1950<sup>755</sup>.

It is instructive to compare Marius Goring's portrayal of a German officer in *Odette* with that in the later Resistance film, *Ill Met by Moonlight* (Powell and Pressburger, 1957). This film is set in Crete and tells the true story of the kidnapping of a German General during the Second World War. It starred Dirk Bogarde in a flamboyant performance as Patrick Leigh Fermor, the British agent who undertakes the task; Goring played Major General Karl Kreipe. There is a light-hearted tone to the film and depictions of brutal German behaviour are muted; we are told of the Germans surrounding villages and taking hostages, but none of this is shown. The audience knows that the mission will succeed, removing any tension that might have been generated. General Kreipe is portrayed as quite decent, although he appears smugly sure that the German troops will be able to release him and crows politely at every British set-back. He has a sense of humour; Moss (David Oxley) describes the Cretans and the British as hungry wolves on the mountains, and the Germans as fat sheep in the valleys, then offers the General a cigarette. Kreipe declines, remarking dryly: 'Sheep do not smoke'. He is also educated: when told he is going to the 'birthplace of Zeus', the General knows that is: 'Mount Ida. Quite a climb'. He has his standards: he shaves; he demands transport equal to his rank (and gets a donkey). He is cunning, intelligent, and tries to get out of his predicament by the use of his wits, leaving a trail of his possessions behind him (which are spotted and collected by Moss); he tries to

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<sup>754</sup> Paul Dehn, *Sunday Chronicle*, 11 June 1950.

<sup>755</sup> Josh Billings, *Kine Weekly*, No.2268, 14 December 1950, p.9.

bribe Niko (a small Cretan boy who travels with the party) into telling the Germans of his whereabouts. This is a point where he could lose the audience's sympathy: he knows that Niko will suffer if he is caught; to make things more uncomfortable for the audience, the General appears to like the boy. He justifies his action to Leigh Fermor later: 'War is war, Major, and facts are facts'. However his stratagem is revealed by Niko, and is used as a trap for his own men. The General is magnanimous in defeat. He acknowledges Niko's qualities: 'He is a brave boy. Clever boy too... Yes, an honest boy'. He tells the two British officers: 'You are not amateurs. You are professionals', and in response to Leigh Fermor's 'No hard feelings?', 'Not at all. It was a highly successful military operation, brilliantly executed. Tell General Brauer [the German commander in charge of the rescue operation] he is an incompetent idiot'; incompetent is how the other Germans in the film are depicted.

Kreipe is depicted as an honest, decent man, with many qualities likely to appeal to the British: his intelligence and his knowledge of the Greek classics; his apparent sense of sportsmanship and fair play shown in his graceful acceptance of defeat; his humour; also his derision of some other Germans. The relationship between him and his captors is one of a certain mutual regard – an underlying assumption of 'comradeship in arms'. At the same time, the General retains elements of the German stereotype: his assurance of rescue. He is always shown as tidily dressed as opposed to his somewhat scruffy kidnappers; at the end of the film, on a British naval vessel heading into captivity, he is neatly turned out with polished boots, the epitome of the German military officer. His compliments to the British irregulars are phrased in a very orthodox military manner – perhaps a hint of Prussian militarism – in strong contrast to the aggressively amateur approach of the British. In contrast to Henri in *Odette*, there is no sense that Kreipe is ambiguous about his country's regime – the subject does not arise. He is shown as a loyal German officer.



Critics were divided about the merits of the film. The trade press was enthusiastic:

‘An authentic, gay and exciting adventure story presented with plenty of vigour, it will undoubtedly prove to be a rousing box-office success in any popular situation’. The ‘slightly *Boy’s Own Paper*-ish effect...distracts in no way from the picture’s entertainment qualities’<sup>756</sup>. It was ‘gripping adventure melodrama...[a] factual story, refreshingly free from blondes, bravado and flag-wagging...Great stuff, it should take the box-office by storm’<sup>757</sup>.

Roy Nash was generally favourable. While criticising the film’s ‘slight smugness’, he went on to state that ‘it has ...plenty of thrills, good performances...’. He noted the light-hearted tone of the piece: ‘The kidnapping is a gentlemanly affair. And the whole mad operation is conducted with a touch of that endearing muddle with which the British like to garnish their more heroic moments’<sup>758</sup>. Leonard Mosley also liked the film<sup>759</sup>. Peter Burnup agreed: ‘There are no mock heroics... But it’s a proud story and good entertainment’<sup>760</sup>. Fred Majdalany concurred: ‘There is a pleasing authenticity ...about the whole charming story – which is most agreeably acted by a cast led by Dirk Bogarde and Marius Goring’. He appreciated the treatment of General Kreipe, citing the incident on the beach near the end of the film when it appears that the British officers do not know the Morse Code and they ask whether he knows it. To quote Majdalany: ‘“Of course I do,” he bellowed. This was the last straw. He had been captured by a couple of amateurs who didn’t even know Morse! He would be the laughing stock of the Wehrmacht’<sup>761</sup>.

Other reviewers had reservations. Anthony Carthew found the treatment of the subject rather too flippant, criticising the way ‘our national love of understatement is carried to

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<sup>756</sup> *Today’s Cinema*, Vol.88, No.7703, 30 January 1957, p.11.

<sup>757</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.2581, 31 January 1957.

<sup>758</sup> Roy Nash, *Star*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>759</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 1 February 1957.

<sup>760</sup> Peter Burnup, *News of the World*, 3 February 1957.

<sup>761</sup> Fred Majdalany, *Daily Mail*, 1 February 1957.

the point of absurdity' and noting that the sections of the film dealing with the post-kidnap journey across the mountains 'should have made a tense and deadly manhunt but the Germans are made to look so stupid, and the kidnappers so casual and almost gay, that the tension is dissipated'<sup>762</sup>. Others appeared to have similar feelings, even if they quite liked the film: 'The Public School Hoplite being purposefully casual, charmingly unprofessional, and yet, by some freak of intuition, effective. And the contrast between this attitude and that of the German, punctiliously professional to the last, is neatly set forth without being overemphasized to the point of stylisation'<sup>763</sup>. For Philip Oakes, it was 'a romping good yarn for boys' which lacked 'the illusion of danger'<sup>764</sup>. *Reynolds News* dismissed the film as 'British amateurism will always beat German efficiency in the end. A nice, comforting, hot-water bottle outlook'<sup>765</sup>. Dilys Powell contrasted the treatment in the film with that of Stanley Moss's book. She thought the background to the story well realised, but was critical of the 'human figures' as 'less convincing'. In particular she noted: 'Kreipe is made a stiff-necked militarist instead of the half-pathetic figure of the book'<sup>766</sup>. As for the British officers, they have become the conventional heroes of our war cinema, brave, boyish, without depth: lacking in the seriousness which I recognise today in those of the group whom I have met'<sup>767</sup>. For Powell, the film worked with stereotypes rather than characters. William Whitebait also criticised the light-hearted tone, commenting on the British liking for elaborate tricks played on the enemy. 'These appeal to us more than the war-winning exploits or the straight tales of heroism; to have diddled the enemy (and of course beaten him – that taken for granted) is somehow deeply satisfying...'. However 'the tone of the whole thing is consistently too light...It plays its coolness too coolly,

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<sup>762</sup> Anthony Carthew, *Daily Herald*, 1 February 1957.

<sup>763</sup> *Time and Tide*, 9 February 1957.

<sup>764</sup> Philip Oakes, *Evening Standard*, 31 January 1957.

<sup>765</sup> Mark Jackson, *Reynolds News*, 3 February 1957.

<sup>766</sup> Apparently Michael Powell corresponded with General Kreipe who 'now lives in retirement in Hanover'. Felix Barker, *Evening News*, 8 September 1956.

<sup>767</sup> Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 3 February 1957.



and ambles about when it should drive straight. Nevertheless, the events it is based on exercise a grip<sup>768</sup>.

Some actively disliked the film. Harold Conway considered that it was just too jolly: '...this time nonchalance proves too much of a good thing'. For him the film lacked tension: '...not for a single moment does the film thrill, or quicken our pulses by half a beat'. He also lamented: '...Marius Goring had given [no] hint of drama behind the general's sardonic suavity<sup>769</sup>'. Robert Kennedy of the *Daily Worker*, considered the film 'soft-pedalling' on the subject of the Nazis, which he put down to a search for economic advantage:

In conformity with the Rank organisation's calculated efforts to clean up on the Continent – especially in Germany – every aspect of Nazi brutality, and the wholesale revenge wreaked on Cretan villages by the Germans after the kidnapping, is soft-pedalled and not allowed to ruffle the surface of this Byronic adventure.

He also disliked the interpretation of General Kreipe: 'Marius Goring plays the Nazi general with an Oxford accent and all the natural qualifications of the public school prefect. He makes the other member of the British trio, Stanley Moss...carry his traps<sup>770</sup>'. As a Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker* had an ideological axe to grind, and this gave it a different opinion of the film's light-hearted treatment of its theme.

The last of the films made by the Powell and Pressburger collaboration, *Ill Met by Moonlight* is little regarded by historians of film, and seen as 'a conventional war adventure movie...' to quote Peter Richards. In a detailed critique he comments on the

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<sup>768</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 9 February 1957.

<sup>769</sup> Harold Conway, *Daily Sketch*, 1 February 1957.

<sup>770</sup> Robert Kennedy, *Daily Worker*, 2 February 1957.

`fierce, arrogant General Kreipe`, in love with `the monster of Nazism` whose `human side is so rigorously repressed by the demands of war and “glory” that he is genuinely unaware of it; ironically, this humanness, which constitutes the true manhood of this Teuton warrior...`. Later he refers to Kreipe`s belief that he has been kidnapped by `amateurs` - `a belief Leigh-Fermor and Moss slyly make no objection to, knowing how it will gnaw at his already shaky Master Race self-confidence`. He reads considerable significance into Kreipe`s attempted bribery of Niko<sup>771</sup>. A strong connection is drawn with Shakespeare`s *A Midsummer Night`s Dream*, apparently on the strength of the title which was not Powell and Pressburger`s but Moss`s. While it is legitimate to argue that the Archers were inspired by the connection, I consider that the arguments put forward by Richards are an extreme interpretation of the film, which was seen at the time, and can be seen now, as a light-hearted wartime adventure story. It is difficult to see how Kreipe can be seen as particularly `fierce and arrogant`. It is true that he insists on the privileges due to his rank – but significantly the Englishmen do not raise much objection to this. The attempted bribery of Niko is distasteful, but Kreipe is trying to escape. The situation is the same as the bribery of the `goon` in *The Wooden Horse*. The `turn of the screw` in Niko`s case is that the temptation is offered to a small boy. Kreipe`s exasperation at the British lack of knowledge of Morse Code is not unreasonable in the context of the mission they have undertaken. One can argue that Kreipe`s subsequent acknowledgement of the professionalism of the British-led operation shows another side of the argument: the British pride themselves on their `amateurism`; Kreipe`s comment can be interpreted as seeing a steely professionalism under the surface nonchalance.

A genre which was revived at the end of the war, but which had been dormant during hostilities, was the prison camp film. The first of these was *The Captive Heart* (Basil

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<sup>771</sup> Peter Richards, `Ill Met by Moonlight` in *Film Comment*, Vol.31, No.2, 1 March 1995, pp.37-40.



Dearden, 1946). As has been shown earlier, prisoners-of-war lived of necessity in close proximity to their German captors, and the attitudes of these British men towards the Germans they dealt with on a day-to-day basis varied considerably. The subject which almost never crops up in British prisoner-of-war films is that many British other ranks were required to work for the Germans during the war (as German prisoners held by the British could be required to work)<sup>772</sup>.

*The Captive Heart* continues the 'People's War' ideology of wartime, and is the film which comes closest to depicting the life experienced by the majority of British prisoners-of-war. The filmmakers showed concern to depict camp life with some authenticity: representatives of the film unit went to Germany very shortly after hostilities ceased with the intention of finding 'an actual prisoner-of-war camp where the life of British prisoners can be reconstructed authentically'. The script was written in conjunction with 'an anonymous writer who was himself released this year from a German POW camp'<sup>773</sup>. The film tells the story of a varied group of soldiers captured in the aftermath of Dunkirk. Interwoven with their stories is that of a Czech, Karel Hasek (Michael Redgrave), who impersonates a dead British officer, Geoffrey Mitchell, in order to escape the Germans who are hunting for him and how he ends up conducting an epistolary love affair with Mitchell's estranged wife, Celia (Rachel Kempson).

The film shows a mixture of officers and other ranks. Early scenes in the film introduce some of the main characters and flashback is used to show their families back home. These flashbacks are intercut with sequences showing the men's weary march

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<sup>772</sup> An exception is the 1962 film, *The Password is Courage* (Andrew L. Stone), apparently based on the real-life adventures of Sergeant Major Charles Coward, which deals both with the POW experiences of the other ranks and the fact of British prisoners of war being required to work for the Germans. The film has a distinctly humorous note which somewhat belies the 'truth' of the events portrayed. The Germans are shown as rather stupid, easily bamboozled by the quick-witted Coward, and the action centres on his unsuccessful attempts to escape. Even the work detail is depicted in terms of its opportunity for escape and for sabotage.

<sup>773</sup> *Daily Film Renter*, Vol. 19, No. 5260, 5 July 1945, p.7.

across France to the German border. The audience is shown the home life of Ted (Jack Warner) and Dai (Mervyn Johns), partners in a small building firm. Ted remembers a small party with their wives the night before the two men had to report for duty. The scene shows the two men discussing the 'last war' and their non-fighting experiences of France. Later they remark on the war 'being over by Christmas', with the comment that they have heard that before, and that 'fighting the same war every twenty years' is not a good idea. Thus the film establishes a clear link between the First and Second World Wars, with the implication that the Germans are responsible for both and have not changed during the inter-war period. One could infer that the Nazis are directly descended from the militaristic regime of Kaiser Bill.

At intervals during the march, the German Army is shown passing the weary column of marchers, usually thundering by on motorcycles, or in tanks. As in *Desert Victory*, the German Army is characterised by mechanised might. In contrast, the sentries guarding the column are shown as trudging along in the same plodding fashion as the captives.

The men are loaded into freight wagons at a railway station. Initially the Germans overseeing the boarding appear to be harassing the British, barking orders for them to hurry up. The British Major, Ossy Dalrymple (Basil Radford), is told, in German, that the officers and men must be separated. Dalrymple does not understand, but the order is translated by 'Mitchell', who speaks fluent German. The Major protests, the only doctor is an officer, and he will be needed to tend the wounded; they at least must accompany the officers. Mitchell translates this request to the German officer, who readily agrees to the two parties remaining together. Initially the German appeared unreasonable; once communication can be established between the two sides, the situation is resolved amicably and to the satisfaction of the British. The padre points out to Dalrymple that some of the other ranks will remain with the officers in any case to serve as orderlies. The film then shows Hasek's story of how he assumed Geoffrey



Mitchell's identity; the sequence depicts him frantically trying to hide from pursuers.

The audience thus is made aware that Hasek/Mitchell is not a German plant.

The prisoners are shown arriving at the camp, which is indicated by the iconic views of barbed wire and watchtowers. The camera moves in on an eagle and swastika symbol on the gate as it closes.

Prison life, as shown in the film, reflects the descriptions of those who endured the experience. Early scenes show the men complaining about lack of soap and tobacco, and also of food, German rations not being adequate. References to escape attempts are fleeting, reflecting that few prisoners, especially those who did not speak German, could or tried to get away. As Osborne comments rather sourly, 'what did a normal Tommy know of finding his way about ... the only types [to escape] were officers, and well to do individuals whom [sic] had travelled, and some even spoke German'<sup>774</sup>.

Mitchell becomes suspected of being a German spy, and is questioned by Dalrymple in the presence of his officers, some of whom assume his guilt. Rebuking them for this, the Padre demands that they do 'not behave like a bunch of Nazis', the practice of assuming guilt not being British. A parade introduces Forster (Karel Stepanek) 'from the Foreign Office', whom Mitchell recognises as a Gestapo man who once commanded the concentration camp where he was imprisoned. Forster's offer of opportunities to broadcast messages home in the absence of mail is ignored by the prisoners.

Over the camp's loudspeaker system comes a harsh German voice praising the 'all-conquering Luftwaffe', and speaking of the bombing of London, unimpeded because the British have no guns to defend their homeland. The threat is made that the attack will continue, and the broadcast ends with German voices singing their 'great battle

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<sup>774</sup> Osborne, Section 2, p.11.

hymn' *Wir Fahren Gegen England*. The men stand around, looking downcast. Ted looks round and responds with 'our great battle hymn', *Roll Out the Barrel*. Gradually others join in until eventually all are singing, drowning out the sound from the loud-speakers. The film thus draws a contrast: the German 'battle hymn' is about aggressive military action; the British adopt a song of cheery, boozy good-fellowship, the essentially military against the pre-eminently civilian.

Forster returns to the camp, and the guards search for evidence of escape. The film shows the German soldiers as being very rough during this, throwing prisoners' belongings around; they find a tunnel. Forster imposes a harsh punishment. The men will be deprived of privileges: no shaving equipment, books, writing materials, tables and chairs. Forster's manner is gloating: he approaches Dalrymple saying he hopes they will make more attempts, clearly punishing the prisoners for such activities amuses him. Earlier, Mitchell related how his family were shot for giving food to a Polish Jew. German sadism and racial policies are thus emphasised.

Throughout the film, the Germans are a background nuisance rather than an integral part of the men's lives, except for Forster. As Marcia Landy comments, prisoner-of-war dramas 'do not linger on the character of the Nazis, who are usually presented as humourless bureaucrats and incompetents'<sup>775</sup>. While no friendly relations between guards and guarded are shown, there is no suggestion of deep animosity: this is reserved for Forster, the representative of the Nazi regime. A camp concert is shown, attended by the German officers, who clearly do not find the 'chorus girls' as amusing as the British do – a hint of the proverbial German lack of humour. Occasionally harsh German actions interrupt the steady flow of life: the prisoners are manacled in reprisal for British actions at Dieppe; the announcement of the German Kommandant to this effect, with Forster present, could be seen as distancing the Wehrmacht officer from the

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<sup>775</sup> Landy, *British Genres*, pp. 172-173.



Gestapo – or as acting willingly under Gestapo orders. It is for the audience to decide. A small scene, where a German soldier is shown manacled the blind David Lennox, indicates the ordinary soldier's dislike of his task: as the man stands up after carrying out the procedure, he gives a little sigh and remarks 'Orders'. It is almost an apology.

Scenes show time passing until March 1944, when a Repatriation Commission is due to examine the men with a view to sending some of them home. Forster returns, informing Mitchell that his photograph will be sent to Gestapo headquarters in Berlin, where it will be compared with their records to ascertain his identity. The long reach of the Gestapo is thus emphasised. His fellow prisoners decide that Mitchell must try for repatriation. When this fails, his comrades come up with a scheme to substitute him for Matthews. This involves the alteration of a list in the Kommandant's office during an air-raid at night, and the familiar imagery of men blacked up, running around an unlit camp, hiding from searchlights, is displayed during this sequence. One shot shows the list being altered under the gaze of a portrait of Hitler on the office wall, perhaps a deliberate linking of the Wehrmacht Kommandant with the Nazi regime. The substitution is successfully made and Mitchell is able to leave the camp among the others to be repatriated. Dalrymple distracts the German Medical Officer. The latter's English is said to be practically non-existent, but the two men have a friendly conversation. Dalrymple praises the MO's improved English. The doctor is clearly very proud of his progress in learning the language, and even ventures a joke about being made headmaster of Oxford University. He is portrayed as quite jolly, if rather pleased with himself.

The final shot of the film shows the camp after VE day, deserted, the German eagle on the gate hanging askew, a potent visual symbol of Germany's defeat.

The film received some very enthusiastic reviews. Dilys Powell praised it as a success because of 'the delicate contrast and correlation of the characters in a film where the whole is so worthily greater than the parts'<sup>776</sup>. John Thompson thought that 'judging from the effect on the hard-bitten critics and exhibitors with whom I saw *The Captive Heart*, it will have a resounding, if tearful, success'<sup>777</sup>, seeing the film's main attraction as its emotional impact. The *Sunday Dispatch* praised the film's authenticity, regarding it as 'the first film to give an accurate idea of what it was like to be a P.O.W'. It concluded 'I'm not very keen on recommending a war film to people who are tired of war films – and that means everybody – but I can confidently urge you to go and see this excellent picture about a phase of the war you've never seen before'<sup>778</sup>. Jympson Harman thought the film 'ennobling and stimulating'<sup>779</sup>. For Ewart Hodgson it represented 'an irresistibly appealing mixture of poignancy and fun' which left him 'profoundly sorry when the screen announced "The End"'<sup>780</sup>. Campbell Dixon's review considered that 'the whole production reveals a sincerity worth more than all the adroit twists and artificial wisecracks'. He thought the film had its faults, including acting more suited to the theatre and a slow tempo<sup>781</sup>. Elspeth Grant was moved to tears, considering that the film gave a good portrayal of the life of a prisoner-of-war<sup>782</sup>. The trade press also praised the film. For *Kine Weekly* it was a 'timely tribute to the unquenchable spirit of the prisoners. It is certain to hold and captivate all types of audience'<sup>783</sup>. *Today's Cinema* echoed these sentiments, but found 'one false note...in the fantastic scene of a bunch of men breaking into the Commandant's office to ensure that the Czech's name is added to the repatriation list. This is simply incredible, not only on its own bizarre by-play but on the Germans' reaction to it'. It still considered

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<sup>776</sup> Dilys Powell, *The Sunday Times*, 31 March 1946.

<sup>777</sup> John Thompson, *Evening Standard*, 29 March 1946.

<sup>778</sup> *Sunday Dispatch*, 31 March 1946.

<sup>779</sup> Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 29 March 1946.

<sup>780</sup> Ewart Hodgson, *News of the World*, 31 March, 1946.

<sup>781</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 1946.

<sup>782</sup> Elspeth Grant, *Daily Sketch*, 29 March 1946.

<sup>783</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.2033, 4 April 1946, pp.37-38.



the film 'Outstanding ...stirring entertainment ...assured of gratifying box-office grosses'<sup>784</sup>.

Not all critics were quite so enthusiastic. While the *Daily Mail* found the prison camp scenes good, 'the rest deals, in a pulp-magazine style, with the love affairs they [the prisoners] left behind... it is difficult to understand how this can be the work of the same writing-directing team which handles so competently men without women'<sup>785</sup>.

For the *Manchester Guardian*, 'Dearden's direction was 'uninspired', and while admiring the camp scenes, it also criticised 'the drama...often has the sentimental tone of a cheap novelette'<sup>786</sup>. Richard Winnington made the same criticism<sup>787</sup>. Helen Fletcher also lamented the invasion of women into the picture, 'a noble and sensitive picture about life in a prison camp in Germany'<sup>788</sup>. C.A. Lejeune considered that 'there is so much in *The Captive Heart* to like and admire that I wish I could recommend it with unqualified praise', noting that it was the first film 'to deal seriously with the experiences of prisoners of war during the long, tedious and trying years in German prison camps'<sup>789</sup>. The film was 'a popular favourite with audiences'<sup>790</sup>.

Unlike the fictional, if realistic, *The Captive Heart*, *The Wooden Horse* (Jack Lee, 1950) was based on a true story, 'adapted from Eric Williams' best-selling book'<sup>791</sup>.

Whereas Williams' book covers the whole period of his captivity, the film concentrates on his escape from his final prison camp. Behind the credits is shown the familiar iconography of a gate with the eagle and swastika symbol, barbed wire fences and

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<sup>784</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.66, No.5323, 29 March 1946, p.28.

<sup>785</sup> *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1946.

<sup>786</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 30 March 1946.

<sup>787</sup> Richard Winnington, *News Chronicle*, 28 March 1946.

<sup>788</sup> Helen Fletcher, *Sunday Graphic*, 31 March 1946.

<sup>789</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 31 March 1946.

<sup>790</sup> Alan Burton, 'Love in a cold climate: critics, filmmakers and the British cinema of quality – the case of *The Captive Heart*' in Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells, eds, *Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture*, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 1997, pp.116-128, p.116.

<sup>791</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.75, No. 6046, 26 July 1950, p.11.

watchtowers, and a caption notes that it is the prisoner of war's hope, 'if not duty', to escape. The film was made on location with the help of the British War Office and Air Ministry, and the action takes place at Stalag Luft III in the summer of 1943.

The opening scene's emphasis is on boredom and monotony and overcrowding. Rather more interaction between prisoners and guards is shown than in *The Captive Heart*. An early scene shows a guard shouting at the prisoners in German and one man, Paul (Bryan Forbes) responds by saying, 'Deutschland kaput'. The guard complains to his superior who speaks English, and Paul is taken off to the 'cooler'. The Germans, it is implied, are bullies (the shouting), lack a sense of humour (they react excessively to a bit of ribbing). A later scene shows the prisoners in the showers, singing. A guard is watching and smiling. Then they begin singing 'Deutschland ist Kaput' to the tune of the German national anthem. The guard takes exception to this and gives them a choice, do they want the shower on or off? They half jeer, half smile, and the shower stays on. This guard, it seems, allows a certain amount of barracking. The prisoners show no respect for their captors: at morning parade, they boo the Kommandant's greeting and while the count is taking place one man ostentatiously reads a book (which gets him a lingering look from the guard). There is, however, some communication between the two sides, and the guards are not always unreasonable: a ball lands in no-man's land between the inner boundary and the outer wire. Peter (Leo Genn) signals to a guard in the neighbouring watchtower to get permission to retrieve the ball and gets a thumbs-up to do so; however a camera shot from behind the guard shows him following Peter's every move with his rifle.

Once the idea of using a vaulting horse as a way of concealing spoil from a tunnel and carrying it away from the boundary fence is conceived, an advertisement is put up for



vaulters. The Kommandant and the Senior British Officer walk past this, and the German, with a superior smirk, comments 'Always this craze for exercise', suggesting a rather amused tolerance for the eccentricities of his charges. The way the two men are walking together, apparently reasonably amicably, indicates another aspect of prisoner-captor relations: the need for a certain degree of co-operation between the two sides, at least at senior level. The horse is watched suspiciously by Charlie, the camp 'ferret', and when Phil (David Tomlinson) knocks it over, Charlie stares across to ascertain whether anything is concealed there. Nothing is; this is a dummy run to get the Germans used to the proceedings. A guard in the watchtower looks through his binoculars at the jumpers, and smiles when a man fails to get over. As time is nearing for the Roll Call, the guard is shown assembling, very drilled, very military and regimented, with their rifles on their shoulders, marching smartly in. German militarism, as opposed to the casual behaviour of the British, is indicated.

Suspicion continues however. A sequence beginning with the shot of a hand knocking on wood moves on to show Charlie examining the horse, knocking on its sides, checking underneath it, clearly still unconvinced that this is an innocent item of gymnastic equipment. Finally he sends his colleague away, and having checked around to see that no one is watching, eyes the horse, smiles gleefully, spits on his hands, squares up and vaults over it. The threatening ferret is thus revealed as a human being. It is, however, the only time in the film that an attractive human side of a German is shown. A search of the camp is conducted in a heavy-handed manner (as in *The Captive Heart*), with soldiers throwing belongings around.

Germans are not always honest: in the hospital, we see a 'goon', the prisoners' word for a guard, trading with a prisoner. The film makes clear that the penalties for such

activities are severe, and once the guard has succumbed to temptation he can be blackmailed into helping with other requests. In the same scene a German officer tries to draw attention to another side to his country, 'Beethoven, he was a good German'. The laconic response is, 'Yes, he's dead'.

Once Peter and John (Anthony Steel) escape, the film shows them within the German civilian population. This consists mainly of men in uniform, whether Service or police, and women. The girl at the ticket office at the station is a stereotypical ash-blonde Aryan. The hotel proprietor in Lübeck is short, fat, plump and bald – another German stereotype. His attitude to the two men, who are pretending to be French workers, is polite but not friendly. He has a picture of Hitler prominently displayed in the hotel lobby. A young German policeman follows the two men and is later seen speaking with the hotel proprietor. While the German population in general is shown to be a threat, the prisoners receive help from French forced labourers. The film emphasises German ill-treatment of those whose countries they have occupied. Russian prisoners are marched by, unkempt and thin; one grovels on the cobbles for a cigarette butt. The French are in effect slave labourers, little better than prisoners, although they do have some freedom of movement. In Denmark in Anna's flat, her fear of harbouring the escapers is an indirect way of indicating German treatment of occupied peoples. The final scene of the film shows Peter and John meeting up again with Phil in Sweden. They are lunching at a smart Swedish restaurant. A party from the German Embassy enters: the man is elderly, very smartly dressed with a wing-collar and a monocle, that prop of the British stereotype of 'the other side'. He stares across in a rather disapproving manner. Phil comments that they are charming people, would not harm a fly 'here'.



The critics liked the film . C.A. Lejeune enjoyed the first half of the film, but found the closing scenes once the escape had taken place `out of place`, and she particularly disliked the ending `trailing off in a luxury hotel`<sup>792</sup>. Several critics commented on the portrayal of the Germans in the film. For *The Times*, `the German guards` were `here properly presented as soldiers going about their job`, and the reviewer considered the device of the horse

would seem to depend on a gamble on the German mentality. The English are mad; therefore it not surprising that, day after day, week after week, crazy Englishmen would continue for a considerable number of hours a day to vault over a wooden horse. The fallacy in the German reasoning is clear, and those who put their faith in that fallacy were justified in the event<sup>793</sup>.

This contrasting of the `craziness` of the English and the failure of imagination of the Germans is referred to by other reviewers: `the Nazi guards shrugged their shoulders at the idiosyncrasies of the British and ceased to pay attention`<sup>794</sup>; C.A. Lejeune commented on `a nice calculation of the psychology of the people it was designed to deceive`<sup>795</sup>; the film `took subtly into account the German belief in an English lunacy colossal enough to make a party of underfed, exhausted men to spend their strength day after day jumping over a box of wood`<sup>796</sup>. The *Manchester Guardian* commented favourably on the `shrewd...refusal to turn the "Gooners" ... into monsters`<sup>797</sup>. By 1950 some reviewers preferred a rather more neutral portrayal of German servicemen than that they were sadistic monsters. However, the perceived stereotype of the British as

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<sup>792</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 20 July 1950. The *Daily Herald*, 28 July 1950, agreed.

<sup>793</sup> *The Times*, 26 July 1950.

<sup>794</sup> Dilys Powell, *Britain Today*, October 1950.

<sup>795</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 20 July 1950.

<sup>796</sup> *Sunday Times*, 30 July 1950.

<sup>797</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1950.

individualistic and quirky as opposed to the Germans' rather unimaginative approach holds sway, even if disguised as British critics' assumption of the German mindset.

The film was popular with the British public; Josh Billings cites it as one of British Lion's 'remarkable money-spinners'<sup>798</sup>.

As the 1950s progressed, prisoner-of-war films became more removed from depictions of the actual experience of prisoners into genre conventions. *The Colditz Story* (Guy Hamilton, 1955) is a good example. Often seen as the archetypal prisoner-of-war film, with its setting in the grim, medieval confines of Colditz Castle and its sympathetic German Kommandant it has much in common with the pre-war French classic, *La Grande Illusion*<sup>799</sup>. Although the Kommandant is portrayed as the stereotypical 'Prussian' officer, shaven headed, smart, with a monocle, warning Colonel Richmond that the punishment for escape is death, he is not a monster. There are no shootings, with the exception of McGill, who, having gone out of his way to antagonise the guards, is shot while attempting to escape. His death appears more personal than a matter of policy. The Kommandant even laughs at the Frenchman's offer to work for the Germans as an undertaker. He watches the camp concert apparently with pleasure, laughing even at the jokes against himself (the pointed direction of the chorus of kilted men to the lines in their song about 'the Kommandant'). Finally, in the circumstances of the near-riot at the end of the film, the Kommandant appeals to Colonel Richmond: 'Colonel, call your men to order, or there will be bloodshed'. Getting no response, he appeals again: 'If you please, Colonel'. He displays an extreme reluctance to use force. The Kommandant is a much more rounded figure than in Reid's book where the

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<sup>798</sup> Josh Billings, *Kine Weekly*, No. 2268, 14 December 1950, p.9.

<sup>799</sup> Landy, *British Genres*, p.174 and see also *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol. 22, No.254, 1 March 1955, pp.32-33.



Kommandant changed during Reid's time at Colditz. The decision to introduce a sympathetic character is obviously dramatic licence.

Priem, the officer in charge of detecting escape attempts, is also shown as not unsympathetic. Physically he seems like many Nazi officers in wartime films, a fat man in uniform with a rather high-pitched laugh, but he is good at his job, foiling many escape attempts. He has a sense of humour: when finding McGill with his head down a tunnel entrance, he remarks: 'What are you doing, Lieutenant McGill, playing squirrels?'; he is amused by Richmond's impersonation of 'Franz Joseph'. He is self-mocking: 'We Germans have no sense of humour'. He shows some sympathy for the men he guards making a point of visiting Richmond in solitary to tell him that Tyler is out of danger (although he is not above using the opportunity to eavesdrop on the conversations of the others so confined). The film reserves its real mockery of the Germans to the small, spectacled officer who makes the announcements about the opportunities to work for the Reich.

The film was almost universally approved by the critics, even those who thought that the escape genre had exhausted its appeal<sup>800</sup>. It had a prestigious premiere, attended by 'ninety bad boys' from Colditz, including high-profile individuals such as 'Earl Haig, the Marquis of Linlithgow, Tory M.P. Airey Neave...and farmer and author Pat Reid'<sup>801</sup>. Some reviewers commented on the German error of putting so many escape-minded individuals in the same place, in words which reflected common British views of the Germans: the actions exhibited 'the genius of Teutonic efficiency'<sup>802</sup>; 'only the Germans with their sense of heavy humour could have thought up the idea of putting all

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<sup>800</sup> See e.g., Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 27 January 1955, Paul Holt, *Daily Herald*, 28 January 1955, *Reynolds News*, 30 January 1955, Peter Burnup, *News of the World*, 30 January 1955.

<sup>801</sup> *News Chronicle*, 27 January 1955.

<sup>802</sup> Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 27 January 1955.

the prisoners who escaped from other camps into one big burglar-proof castle<sup>803</sup>.

Reviewers noted the generally sympathetic portrayal of Germans. For *Monthly Film Bulletin*, the German Kommandant was 'an old soldier, stern but not without a sense of humour' and he 'and the German Staff are portrayed with irony, but little malice'<sup>804</sup>.

*Sight and Sound* referred to 'the "other side" represented by the German guards [who] are treated in a generally good-humoured manner: clearly they never understood the "mad" English'<sup>805</sup>. Virginia Graham praised the lack of 'traditional types', there was no 'Prussian sadist'<sup>806</sup>. It was noted that 'at moments one feels quite sorry for the Germans striving so hard to decipher the obscure antics, social as well as physical, of their British captives, whose contempt is couched in such eccentric terms'<sup>807</sup>. This sentiment was echoed by H. Dorn who commented that 'one felt a little sympathy for the Nazi guards, always having their legs pulled'<sup>808</sup>. Thomas Spencer also noted that 'the Nazis are comically pompous rather than downright vicious'<sup>809</sup>. Paul Dehn remarked that 'the Germans, for once, are human – particularly Frederick Valk's commandant and Denis Shaw's bloated but vulnerable security man'<sup>810</sup>. However he also indicated a leaning towards a more stereotyped view of the Germans, referring to 'back-area Nazi soldiers who at least were supermen in their own Nordic imaginations'<sup>811</sup>, and Leonard Mosley also referred to the Germans in the film as 'the Nazis'<sup>812</sup>. Campbell Dixon also noted the portrayal of the Germans, a depiction which, incidentally, Eric Williams, himself an escaper, approved: 'The German guards look

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<sup>803</sup> *Reynolds News*, 30 January 1955.

<sup>804</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.22, No.254, 1 March 1955, pp.32-33.

<sup>805</sup> *Sight and Sound*, Vol.24, No.4, 1 April 1955, p.200.

<sup>806</sup> Virginia Graham, *Spectator*, 28 January 1955. See also, *Manchester Guardian*, 29 January 1955, 'the film...gets its effects without ever pretending that all or even most of the German captors were detestable'.

<sup>807</sup> Virginia Graham, *Spectator*, 28 January 1955.

<sup>808</sup> H. Dorn, *Sunday Dispatch*, 30 January 1955.

<sup>809</sup> Thomas Spencer, *Daily Worker*, 29 January 1955.

<sup>810</sup> See also Eric Williams, *Evening Standard*, 28 January 1955, reference to feeling sorry 'for the fat German security officer, Hauptmann Priem, who never seems to have a moment's peace...'.  
<sup>811</sup> Paul Dehn, *News Chronicle*, 28 January 1955.

<sup>812</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 28 January 1955.



and behave exactly as they should'<sup>813</sup>. For Dixon, 'it is pleasant...to know that at Colditz the commandant was just and humane, and the guards – Wehrmacht men who hated the S.S. – no stricter than they need to be'<sup>814</sup>. The trade press, as would be expected, had high praise for the film. *Today's Cinema* noted it was a 'vividly engrossing document of unflinching heroism directed with quite extraordinary precision... completely realistic approach...brilliant treatment eschews sentimentality, adroitly introduces typical humour and subtly underlines the British attitude to the makers of war' (again, the Germans are seen as warmongers). The reviewer also praised Frederick Valk's 'impressive Commandant', and 'Denis Shaw a subtly drawn Priem who is always suspecting his charges of secret contempt'<sup>815</sup>. *Kine Weekly* also enthused: 'intriguing and amusing prison camp melodrama', summing up its points of appeal as 'fascinating subject, new approach, first-class acting, resourceful direction, best-seller title and box-office stars'. It notes that the film 'never deliberately whips up hate. Apart from a couple of tough German officers...the main action takes the form of a keen, yet good-humoured war of nerves between captives and their captors...Frederick Valk displays power, authority and fair judgement as the Kommandant'<sup>816</sup>. The public agreed with these critics: the film was among Josh Billings' money-makers of the year<sup>817</sup>.

Criticisms of the film were confined to the fact that, despite its air of authenticity, it failed to deal adequately with the serious problems affecting British prisoners-of-war.

*Monthly Film Bulletin* summarised this complaint well: 'The life of the prisoners-of-

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<sup>813</sup> Eric Williams, *Evening Standard*, 28 January 1955.

<sup>814</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 January 1955.

<sup>815</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.84, No.7191, 26 January 1955, p.12.

<sup>816</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No.2483, 27 January 1955, p.27. The comedy aspect was noted by other reviewers, see e.g. *Sight and Sound*, Vol.24, No.4, 1 April 1955, p.200, Fred Majdalany, *Time and Tide*, 5 February, 1955 and *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1955, Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 30 January 1955. C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 30 January 1951, considered it was 'as adventurous and high-spirited as something by Dumas, or Doyle, or Stevenson', and was not necessarily comedy therefore, but shared aspects with fictional thrillers.

<sup>817</sup> Josh Billings, *Kine Weekly*, No.2529, 15 December, 1955, p.5.

war with its mixture of depression, frustration and anticipation of release, has been liberally chronicled in the post-war British cinema. None of these films has attempted any really serious analysis of the effects on the minds of men forced to endure tragic years of confinement<sup>818</sup>. William Whitebait considered that the film 'has the sort of excitement a good story and good acting can give it; but it is "true" only because we're told so, and not because the nerves and the heart insist'. He also had reservations about the characterisation 'perhaps the commandant did really sport, yet again, an eyeglass and *politesse*...' <sup>819</sup>. For Whitebait the film contained 'typical types' and lacked the authenticity which would have led to greater emotional engagement with the action shown.

While the film is discussed in the literature, it is in relation to its status as a war and prisoner-of-war film, with no particular consideration being given to its portrayal of Germans<sup>820</sup>.

In 1955, the critics (and, they thought, the public too) considered that the prisoner-of-war story had run its course. Paul Dehn suggested, however: 'No one seems to have thought of revitalising the subject by making a film about German prisoners in Allied hands – though if that in fact were done, our more humane treatment of the enemy would not, I think, be found to alter or diminish the mainsprings of what used to be called P.o.W. [sic] neurosis'<sup>821</sup>. By 1957 it was considered possible to follow this advice. *The One That Got Away* (Roy Baker) could tell the 'true story' of Franz von Werra, 'the only German prisoner of war taken in Britain to escape and get back to

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<sup>818</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.22, No.254, 1 March 1955, pp.32-33. See also Paul Dehn, *News Chronicle*, 28 January 1955, Eric Williams, *Evening Standard*, 28 January 1955 and Dilys Powell, *Sunday Times*, 30 January 1955.

<sup>819</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 5 February 1955.

<sup>820</sup> See e.g. Landy, *British Genres*, pp.174-175 and Murphy, pp.214-215.

<sup>821</sup> Paul Dehn, *News Chronicle*, 28 January 1955.



Germany'. Played by Hardy Kruger, an early scene in the film of Von Werra's interrogation by the British indicates that he is too sure of himself, a boaster and a self-publicist. However, he is both brave and determined: he persists in trying to escape and finally makes his way to freedom across the frozen St. Lawrence in Canada. The film plays with audience expectations: in a POW drama, sympathy should be with the escaper, but here the gaolers are British and the escaper is German. Von Werra is initially portrayed as arrogant and boastful, and the expectation is that he will be revealed as a coward; in fact, he is a brave and resourceful man. He appears at first to conform to the stereotype of the militaristic, arrogant, deceitful German. Even physically, in the person of Kruger, he is tall, blonde, handsome, the epitome of the Aryan superman. Yet the audience is invited to empathise with him, to see his good qualities.

Roy Baker wished to move away from tradition stereotypes of 'homosexual Prussian officers, Gestapo torturers or beer-swilling Bavarians...' <sup>822</sup>. However in this film the German shows many aspects of the wartime portrayals, in the role itself as 'a Nazi in a war film' <sup>823</sup>, and 'the very Germanness of his physical appearance' <sup>824</sup>. Critics who liked the film saw its hero in terms reminiscent of the stereotype with references to his fair hair <sup>825</sup>, his arrogance or over-confidence and his trickery: 'imperturbable arrogance and cunning resource...cocksure confidence...uppish temperament' <sup>826</sup>, 'bravado of an airborne Teddy-boy' <sup>827</sup>; and his boastfulness: 'Was he ...a bit of a line-

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<sup>822</sup> Quoted in Melanie Williams, '“The most explosive object to hit Britain since the V2!”: The British Films of Hardy Kruger and Anglo-German Relations during the 1950s', *Cinema Journal*, Vol. 46, No.1, Fall 2006, pp.85-107, p.88.

<sup>823</sup> Ibid., p.88.

<sup>824</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>825</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.89, No.7879, 10 October 1957, p.5, *Kine Weekly*, No.2617, 10 October 1957, p.17, and Jympson Harman, *Evening News*, 10 October 1957, 'Berlin's blond, handsome favourite, Hardy Kruger'.

<sup>826</sup> *Today's Cinema*, 10 October 1957, p.5,

<sup>827</sup> Philip Oakes, *Evening Standard*, 10 October 1957.

shooter?'<sup>828</sup>. Nevertheless his good qualities were also noted: 'boyish charm hiding an invincible will to be free'<sup>829</sup>; 'undaunted'<sup>830</sup>, 'ingenuity, ready resource, coolness and stamina are qualities that compel admiration...'<sup>831</sup>. Kruger's performance was admired<sup>832</sup>. Philip Oakes noted the irony 'that the only tribute to a dead Nazi should come from a British studio', but nevertheless wished the film well<sup>833</sup>. Critics remarked on the possibility of anti-German feelings affecting the public's reaction to the film: the *Sunday Dispatch* thought that Von Werra's bravery would be cheered 'despite the German-haters who howled about the Rommel film – and will, no doubt, kick up a fuss about this one'<sup>834</sup>, and the *Daily Mail* hoped that the Rank Organisation 'will be spared the sterile animosities of patriotic prejudice'<sup>835</sup>.

The *Daily Worker* strongly disapproved of the film, describing it as a 'tribute to [a] Nazi braggart' and Rank as 'the first British company to make a film glorifying the Nazi air ace...'. Rank was accused of base motives, it was 'a frank effort to capture the West German and Continental film market', taking advantage of British audiences' liking for 'escaping club' stories<sup>836</sup>. Anthony Carthew agreed: 'this is a picture beamed with knowing accuracy at the German market...It leaves a nasty taste since it is based on the kind of forgive-and-forget morality which many people will find not to their liking'. He contrasted the book on which the film was based, where Von Werra's lies were exposed, and the film where they were glossed over<sup>837</sup>.

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<sup>828</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 12 October 1957; Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 12 October 1957, sees Von Werra as 'arrogant, boastful and a congenital liar about his victories in the air'.

<sup>829</sup> *Daily Film Renter*, No.7484, 10 October 1957, p.5.

<sup>830</sup> *Kine Weekly*, 10 October 1957, p.17.

<sup>831</sup> *Today's Cinema*, 10 October 1957, p.5.

<sup>832</sup> *Today's Cinema*, 10 October 1957, p.5, *Daily Film Renter*, 10 October 1957, p.5.

<sup>833</sup> Philip Oakes, *Evening Standard*, 10 October 1957.

<sup>834</sup> Moore Raymond, *Sunday Dispatch*, 13 October 1957.

<sup>835</sup> Edward Young, *Daily Mail*, 12 October 1957.

<sup>836</sup> Robert Kennedy, *Daily Worker*, 12 October 1957.

<sup>837</sup> Anthony Carthew, *Daily Herald*, 11 October 1957.



Melanie Williams states that the film was an 'unexpected success... hugely profitable on its European release, particularly in Germany'<sup>838</sup>. The film has an 'underlying ideological purpose'. The developing Cold War had led to the need for 'films that featured "good Germans" [playing] a key role in creating a new understanding between the two nations'<sup>839</sup>, and to 'construct a version of German masculinity which would be acceptable and appealing to both British and overseas audiences'<sup>840</sup>. In *The One That Got Away* this is achieved by acknowledging the undesirable characteristics of the hero but also emphasising his good qualities. Williams discusses the film in some detail, noting that while efforts are made to undermine audience empathy with Von Werra, the charisma of Kruger and his performance tend to counteract this<sup>841</sup>. In an escape film, audience sympathy tends to be with 'the fugitive ... accentuated by the British sense of sportsmanship'<sup>842</sup>. From the industry point-of-view, the featuring of a German escaper provided a 'new twist'<sup>843</sup> to a popular but tired genre.

A group of films made in the post-war period dealt directly or indirectly with the subject of Britain's occupation of its zone of Germany and the difficult question of how the Germans there should be treated. The British encountered numerous problems, as did the other Allies. German cities and towns had been badly bombed in the latter stages of the war: there was a lack of accommodation<sup>844</sup>. The infrastructure was badly damaged: gas and electricity supplies were intermittent or non-existent, and lack of power affected sewage treatment works with the resultant risk of disease; there was considerable damage to both road and rail networks. A shortage of food in urban areas

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<sup>838</sup> Melanie Williams, p.86.

<sup>839</sup> Ibid., p.87.

<sup>840</sup> Ibid., p.86.

<sup>841</sup> Ibid., pp.91-93.

<sup>842</sup> *Kine Weekly*, 10 October 1957, p.17.

<sup>843</sup> *Daily Film Renter*, 10 October 1957, p.5.

<sup>844</sup> For a detailed, but controversial, account of the effects of Allied bombing from the German point of view, see Jörg Friedrich (trans. Allison Brown), *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006.

was compounded by the damage to the communications network which made moving supplies more difficult. Problems were made more intractable in Berlin in the earlier period of British occupation by the difficulties of having to deal with the Russians<sup>845</sup>.

As had already been discussed, the attitudes of the occupying servicemen varied considerably. Whether the British occupiers were sympathetic to the plight of the civilians they found themselves among or not, they dealt with people, not with concepts. Films were seen by the people back home, who had little, if any, day-to-day experience of Germans as individuals (an exception would be in those areas where German prisoners worked). So how did the cinema represent the newly conquered Germans?

*Frieda* (Basil Dearden, 1947) discusses the problems of being an occupying power indirectly. The film is a dramatised discussion of how to treat the Germans: is there such a thing as collective guilt or should individuals be judged individually. This dilemma is shown through the reactions of a small English country town to the German girl (Mai Zetterling) one of its menfolk brings home as his wife shortly before the end of the war. The plotline is that he was a prisoner-of-war whom she helped to escape, and he marries her from a sense of obligation, to enable her to obtain British citizenship. Although her devotion to Robert (David Farrar) is conveyed by her endurance of his and his fellow countrymen's treatment of her, the reason for her behaviour is never explained. We are never told how or why she helped him to escape; the implication is some form of 'love at first sight', but this absence of any explanation for her behaviour and the fact that we are told she has risked her life rather than our

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<sup>845</sup> For a soldier's view of the situation in Berlin, see Colonel Nunn's papers. The papers of Brigadier Sir John Dunlop (IWM, Department of Documents, Brigadier Sir John Dunlop KBE, CMG, MC, TD papers (74/164/18 and 74/164/22)) give a vivid picture of the situation in Hamburg in the immediate post-war period.



actually seeing her doing this makes little of any sacrifice she may have made. She functions as a vehicle for the working out of British attitudes to the Germans rather than a convincing individual in her own right.

Throughout much of the film Frieda is differentiated from the English people around her. The opening scene of the marriage ceremony shows the priest and Frieda speaking in German, Robert making his responses in English, an emphasis on their different nationalities<sup>846</sup>. Frieda addresses her husband as 'Robert', in contrast to his family's more familiar 'Bob', an allusion to German formality perhaps. Frieda is a Roman Catholic and will not regard the marriage as valid until it has been solemnised in a Catholic ceremony, so throughout the film the couple's marital status remains ambiguous. Contrary to Robert's optimistic belief, Frieda is not welcomed when they come to his family home. His mother is uncertain how to treat the girl; Edith, the housekeeper (Gladys Henson), and Bob's ambitious aunt, Nell (Flora Robson), are actively hostile; his young step-brother, Tony, refers to her as 'Lily the Werewolf'. Only one person, Robert's widowed sister-in-law, Judy (Glynis Johns), whose husband, Alan, was shot down during the war, shows her any sympathy. The local people are hostile: the builder's labourer will not work in a house where a German will live; at the pub, a group of men argue, dividing into those who are instinctively antagonistic to Frieda and those who will wait and see what she is like (a neat encapsulation of the film's theme). At the town hall, a neighbour, introduced by Judy, avoids shaking Frieda's proffered hand.

Frieda is depicted as a stereotypical Aryan girl. She is a fine subject for an appeal to British sympathies, young, fragile-looking, pretty and blonde; her previous

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<sup>846</sup> Wendy Webster, 'Reconstructing boundaries: gender, war and empire in British cinema, 1945-1950' in *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol.23, No.1, 1 March 2003, pp.43-57, p.47.

employment as a nurse marks her as a carer. This stereotypical depiction is emphasised in a montage sequence where we see Frieda and Robert working on a farm with Frieda feeling the hens, churning butter, and sitting on a hay cart singing (in German)<sup>847</sup>.

When Edith is 'laid up', Frieda takes on most of the housework and is described as a wonderful cook. The couple's relationship appears to be blossoming. By Christmas, Frieda is accepted by the majority of the townspeople (a party at the town hall shows her happily dancing with the neighbours).

While the film's portrayal of the girl invites the audience's sympathy for her, the case against the Germans as a people is put. One sequence shows Robert and Frieda enjoying an evening at the cinema when a newsreel of the horrors of Belsen concentration camp comes on the screen. The sequence cuts between glimpses of starved bodies and corpses and Frieda's anguished and horrified face. Outside the cinema she faces Robert: 'My people did that – my people – Germans'. He asks if she knew; she half-evades the question: 'I knew. I knew that there were such places. We all knew. Some of us were in them'. While admitting she knew of the existence of the camps, Frieda does not confess that she knew what was happening in them.

Nell powerfully puts the case for collective guilt, telling an election rally, in the hearing of her nephew and his wife, that 'passively or actively she has been party to a monstrous crime. She cannot evade responsibility for it. She cannot escape its consequences', to which Frieda's later, despairing response, is that what she as an individual does is of no consequence, her nationality renders her guilty to some. Nell has clear views about the nature of Germans. During a conversation when Frieda states

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<sup>847</sup> Brunsdon and Moseley see this iconography as 'at the same time both "Aryan" and idyllically English – there seems to be a harmonious "international" emerging...', Charlotte Brunsdon and Rachel Moseley, '“She's a foreigner who's become a British subject”: *Frieda*' in Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells, eds, *Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture*, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 1997, pp.129-136, p.135.



that despite the acceptance of most people what Nell thinks matters to her, the cutting rejoinder is 'To be satisfactory the conquest must be complete. How very German'. To a Catholic priest who suggests that many people can be reclaimed from Nazi ideology, it is individuals who count, Nell disagrees: 'You can't take Germans individually...because there's a link – a common denominator in every one of them; something that twice in our lifetime has set the world ablaze. Call it the essence of Germanism, the German mind...It's common to every German, man, woman and child, and we're blind idiots if we believe otherwise. It's inborn, in the blood'.

Nell's hardline views are the mirror image of those of a Nazi, Frieda's brother, Rikky (Albert Lieven), who turns up at the house at Christmas. He seems charming and Frieda is delighted to see him. His true nature is revealed at a rehearsal for Frieda and Bob's Catholic wedding when he gives a horrified Frieda a swastika emblem on a chain. A later scene between them shows Rikky is an unrepentant Nazi who praises Frieda for having made a conquest of the British, an echo of Nell's earlier remarks. She tells Rikky that 'He's dead...Hitler is dead', and that she never was a Nazi, to which Rikky retorts that she was never an anti-Nazi either. If she rejects Hitler's Germany now, did she ever do so during the years of victory – her silence suggests she did not. She speaks of Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven and Brahms, 'Germany's gift to the world'. However, Rikky (as Nell does) sees all Germans as one, and he wants another war, he has trained for it since he was a child and knows nothing else. Frieda suggests he must stay in England and learn the ways of peace.

At the pub, Robert finds out that Rikky was a concentration camp guard who beat a local man badly. He takes out his frustration on Rikky, fighting with him and soundly thrashing him before handing him over to the police. During the encounter, Rikky

poisons Robert's mind against Frieda, repeating his view that all German are united in 'loyalty, faith and blood. What you see in me you'll see in her and her children – your children'.

Robert rejects Frieda, telling Nell he thinks her views are correct. A subsequent conversation between a horrified Judy and an unconcerned Nell makes it clear that both suspect Frieda will harm herself. Later Nell sees Frieda walk out into the snow without a coat in a state of extreme distress. She watches calmly then closes the curtains behind the girl. However, she cannot leave Frieda to kill herself and calls Robert who is in time to save her from the river. While Robert is at his wife's bedside, the family discuss the situation. Edith comments that the British are all different, and no one judges the whole community by one bad individual: 'But when a German's a bad lot, we say that's all Germans'. Nell admits she suspected Frieda's suicidal intentions: 'One sure way out for all of us...It seemed logical...even to her'. Judy protests and Nell agrees: 'No matter who they are, no matter what they've done, you can't treat human beings as less than human without becoming less than human yourself'. The film ends with Frieda in Robert's arms and the possibility of a happy marriage.

Nell's hardline views are ultimately shown to be wrong. Both Nell and Rikky see all Germans as the same; while Nell may be less strident in her expression of this sentiment than Rikky, the fact that these views are expressed by the ardent Nazi implicitly discredits them<sup>848</sup>.

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<sup>848</sup> When discussing the pairing of Nell and Rikky, Brunsdon and Moseley comment on Nell's closing of the curtains when Frieda walks out of the house. In contrast to Frieda, who refuses to leave the cinema but watches the film on the horrors of Belsen, Nell 'closes the curtains so that she does not witness ... what is happening', in which she reveals the same fault as those Germans who decided not to see what was going on around them, see Brunsdon and Moseley in *Liberal Directions*, pp. 135 and 136.



Rikky can be seen as the bad German, as opposed to Frieda's good (or at least redeemable) German. He conforms to the masculine stereotype, he is aggressive, militaristic, a war-lover. He is capable of deception and of treachery towards his kindly hosts (the Dawsons), and even initially to his sister. However, even Rikky is not inherently bad; as his comment that he longs for war because he has been trained for nothing else indicates he has been brain-washed into his views, they are a result of cultural conditioning rather than natural inheritance. Frieda's suggestion that he must learn the ways of peace in England suggests that she sees a future for him; it is an expression of the idea that Germans can be re-educated to be peace-loving, good democrats.

The concerns voiced by the film, that Germans are inherently brutal, bullying and aggressive and that these character defects are common to all Germans, that there is no way these people can be turned into peaceful European neighbours, echo British concerns at the end of the war that the Germans had twice dragged Europe into conflict within the previous thirty years and should not be allowed to do so again. The film's ending implicitly rejects this view.

The critics on the whole took a favourable view of the film for its tackling of an important topical issue, if it was not always praised for its execution. *Today's Cinema*, summarising the story saw the 'eventual acceptance of German girl by husband's family on strength of her wifely loyalty and eventual proffered sacrifice of her own life', in contrast to 'wife's Nazi brother who typifies all that is evil in Germanic creed'. The reviewer saw the disagreement between Frieda and Rikky as one where 'we have Frieda clearly standing for British revulsion against German atrocities, whilst on the other we have her Nazi brother no less clearly living only for another and yet another

war which shall see his country triumphant<sup>849</sup>. This reviewer appears to see Frieda as representing Britain in the last stages of the film. *Kine Weekly* was less sure of the film's appeal, regarding it as 'primarily made for the less subtle feminine mind', and considering 'the picture is a little ponderous in its approach to its "let bygones be bygones" theme', and commenting that 'some may consider it a bit early to talk about shaking our enemies by the hand'<sup>850</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin*, on the other hand, thought it a 'realistic, tense and well-acted film', with 'its approach...intelligent and straightforward'. 'This is definitely a film with a theme which will set any audience thinking'<sup>851</sup>. Ewart Hodgson praised the film: 'Everything about *Frieda* is splendidly adult but never dull. The story is so clearly told, and every character so shrewdly observed, that you will feel you were living in that village and taking sides in the controversy over Frieda'<sup>852</sup>. The *Evening Standard* was also enthusiastic: the film has the 'courage to answer the question' of whether 'all German are bad Germans', and 'it does it with such conviction that it challenges bigotry and will confuse prejudice'. The reviewer considered that the character of Rikky was 'overdrawn. Nevertheless he serves as a symbol if he does not serve as a character'. The film was seen as dealing with a contemporary social problem, but also as entertaining.<sup>853</sup> C.A. Lejeune considered that the film 'might have been a fine film', but still praised it for 'a high integrity...and a quality of prodding the sluggish mind that is altogether salutary and splendid'<sup>854</sup>.

Others were less sure of the film's qualities. The *Sunday Chronicle* saw it as 'a film of abstractions, of symbol and ideas rather than living, breathing people'; 'because the

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<sup>849</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.68, No. 5508, 20 June 1947, pp. 14 and 17.

<sup>850</sup> *Kine Weekly*, No. 2905, 26 June 1947, pp. 16 and 18.

<sup>851</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.14, No.163, 1 July 1947, pp.94-95.

<sup>852</sup> Ewart Hodgson, *News of the World*, 6 July 1947.

<sup>853</sup> *Evening Standard*, 4 July 1947. The film was favourably reviewed in the *People*, 6 July 1947 and the *Daily Telegraph*, 7 July 1947.

<sup>854</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 6 July 1947.



Ideas always dominate the characters and the characters so rarely *embody* [reviewer's italics] the ideas, these symbols never truly clash. They only tinkle'<sup>855</sup>. Leonard Mosley showed a certain degree of scepticism, commenting sarcastically (one assumes) that 'Frieda was one of those German girls who never really approved of Hitler and the Nazis, but hardly thought it prudent to say so while the Fuehrer was still around...', changing her mind about 'determinedly ' looking the other way when she meets Robert. He goes on to comment that the filmmakers 'seem to think this reprehensible and typically Teutonic', and that the apparently happy ending left 'plenty of healthy scepticism about the Germans ever becoming a changed people'<sup>856</sup> which seems an odd interpretation of the film. The *Daily Worker* considered that the question of whether there are 'good Germans as well as bad Germans...is treated with...sincerity and restraint...and yet it is not entirely satisfactory. The solution of the problem seems to confuse rather than clarify'. The reviewer's final comments is that 'in the original play Frieda comes to realise her political responsibility and decides to return to Germany to work out her personal regeneration. The film's happy ending does not solve the problem nearly so satisfactorily'<sup>857</sup>. The critical view could be summarised as a general agreement that the questions of German responsibility for the Nazi regime and its actions and how the British should treat the defeated enemy were important ones, but division as to how effectively *Frieda* dealt with these issues. The film was a box office success<sup>858</sup>.

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<sup>855</sup> *Sunday Chronicle*, 6 July 1947.

<sup>856</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 4 July 1947.

<sup>857</sup> *Daily Worker*, 5 July 1947.

<sup>858</sup> See 'Interview with Michael Relph' in Alan Burton, Tim O'Sullivan and Paul Wells, eds, *Liberal Directions: Basil Dearden and Postwar British Film Culture*, Trowbridge, Flicks Books, 1997, pp.241-248, p.245, where Relph comments that the film was 'an enormous commercial success'.

*Frieda* has been widely discussed in film literature, often from a gender perspective<sup>859</sup>. This is not always the case however. Robert Murphy sees the film as evidence of the 'melodrama and nostalgia [which] seeped into war films' during the postwar period<sup>860</sup>. When discussing *Frieda* specifically, he places the film in the context of Vansittart's broadcasts<sup>861</sup>, and the need to brighten Germany's image now the country was 'an essential buffer between West and the vastly expanded Soviet empire'<sup>862</sup>. He comments on Frieda's gentleness and kindness – 'the dice are unfairly loaded' in favour of her acceptance - but also sees that 'the question of her guilt as a German is dealt with seriously'<sup>863</sup>. While noting the resemblance between the views of Rikky and Nell, he contends that 'she acts as a lightning conductor, expressing views about the Germans which would not have been uncommon in the aftermath of the war', and that she expresses such views 'thoughtfully and carefully', in contrast to the 'irrational zeal' of Rikky<sup>864</sup>. I would argue that Nell displays a cold-blooded logic in her attitude to Frieda's suicide attempt, her change of heart occurring just in time to save the girl's life. In some respects her cool rationality, contrary to the warm-hearted acceptance of Frieda by most of Denfield, as the film has emphasised, is morally more disturbing than culturally-conditioned Rikky's fanaticism. Jeffrey Richards sees the film as 'a celebration of that mainstream British virtue: tolerance'<sup>865</sup>. Nell herself comments in the film that such tolerance is both 'our greatest strength and our greatest weakness'.

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<sup>859</sup> As, for example, Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, 'Men at Work: Dearden and Gender' in Burton, O'Sullivan and Wells, pp.89-107.

<sup>860</sup> Murphy, p.179.

<sup>861</sup> Ibid., p.182. See also Terry Lovell, 'Frieda' in Geoff Hurd, ed, *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television*, London, BFI Publishing, 1984, pp. 30-34, p.31 where she discusses both the drawbacks to Vansittart's views in their stiffening of German resistance and how such views were 'widely endorsed'.

<sup>862</sup> Murphy, p.183. See also Terry Lovell, p.31, where she argues that 'this period was one in which the images of Germany and the German people were undergoing rapid change. The wartime black and white presentation of "the enemy" was already obsolete and damaging, inappropriate to Germany in defeat and in need of rapid economic and political reconstruction, in order that Germany and Britain might take their place side by side in the Western Alliance against the new "enemy" in the East'.

<sup>863</sup> Murphy, p.183.

<sup>864</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>865</sup> Jeffrey Richards, 'Basil Dearden at Ealing' in Burton, O'Sullivan and Wells., pp. 14-35, p.26.



Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim comment that 'women, for Dearden, are of interest insofar as they encapsulate...problems to be resolved by the male character'<sup>866</sup>. In *Frieda* there is therefore a nice conflation of that inclination and the propaganda agenda. For *Frieda* to function as a plea for some tolerance and understanding of the Germans, there must be the possibility of audience sympathy with the main German character, hence the concentration on a young, delicate-seeming, pretty, blonde girl who is the antithesis of the stereotype image of the German as a militaristic, monocled, shaven-headed, brutal and aggressive male. Frieda is assimilated into the Dawson family and Denfield itself (and Denfield represents an image of England<sup>867</sup>). Reconciliation can thus be shown to have occurred, at least up to a point, with German civilians, those not directly involved in fighting the war.

Charlotte Brunsdon and Rachel Moseley also look at *Frieda* from a gender perspective. They consider that 'one of the explicit projects of this postwar film is to effect a shift away from essentialist notions of national identity...to a rather more pragmatic and individual sense of national belonging'<sup>868</sup>. The obvious result of such a shift is that Germans (and British) should be thought of as individuals rather than nations, a rejection of the concept of collective guilt. They refer to Erica Carter's comments on the *Trümmerfrauen*, 'suggesting that the stoicism and labour of these women provided [for German films] one of the few possible sites of a moral purity from which German men were at this stage excluded'<sup>869</sup>. Much the same situation can be seen to prevail in *Frieda*. There is her stoical endurance of the hostility of the townspeople and some of Robert's family. She is a hard worker. By contrast, the male German character is extremely flawed. Brunsdon and Moseley also draw an analogy between Robert and

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<sup>866</sup> Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim in *Liberal Directions*, p.101.

<sup>867</sup> Lovell, 'Frieda' in Hurd, p.31.

<sup>868</sup> Brunsdon and Moseley, p.129.

<sup>869</sup> Ibid., p.131.

Frieda's marriage and the actual situation of Britain's occupation of Germany: 'perhaps "marriage", in the film's terms, might be seen here as a question of "occupation" and control, and re-education of the conquered by the conqueror. This is how Germany will be "saved"'<sup>870</sup>. Robert's relationship to Frieda, initially based on a duty of care rather than on affection can be seen as akin to the British occupiers of Germany, responsible for the welfare of their recent foes.

*Frieda* is a social problem film dealing with the postwar difficulty of how the British should relate to the German people: should they be condemned collectively for the crimes of the *Hitlerzeit*, or should each individual's behaviour be judged on its merits. Frieda can be seen as representing the 'ordinary' German, not necessarily openly anti-Nazi and maybe caught up in the excitement of victory (the conversation with Rikky indicates that), but a person with the right instincts and thoughts 'in my heart'. She is willing to face up to what was done by 'my people'. She endures hostility when she first arrives in England, and works hard on an English farm to feed English people. Before Rikky's arrival she can be seen to have made her act of contrition. However, the film cannot resolve the more difficult problem of how to deal with the unrepentant Nazi German, personified by Rikky. While acknowledging that Rikky has been brought up to believe in war and the need for his country to expunge the shame of defeat, therefore his attitude is not necessarily a sign of inherent fault, the film's solution to Rikky's brutal treatment of Merrick is for Robert to treat Rikky in a rather similar way, by savagely beating him up before handing him over to the authorities for judicial process. While the film discusses the need for some form of reconciliation between the British and the Germans, and the critics of the time recognised this, the problem of the persistence of Nazi beliefs among some of the German population

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<sup>870</sup> Ibid., p.133.



proves intractable. At the same time, the film explicitly rejects Nell's (and Vansittart's) view that all Germans are the same. Given the film's apparent popularity at the box office, presumably its underlying message was acceptable to the British public of the time.

Other films dealt more explicitly with the British role in occupied Germany, for example *Portrait from Life* (Terence Fisher, 1948). The film tells the story of a British major's (Guy Rolfe) search for a young girl, Hildegarde, seen in a portrait in an exhibition in London. Professor Menzel (Arnold Marlé) thinks she is his lost daughter, Lidia. The dying artist, Duncan Reid (Robert Beatty) mutters his final words: 'Hendlmann knows what Hildegarde has forgotten', indicating a mystery attaching to the girl.

Lawrence manages to track Hildegarde (Mai Zetterling) to a displaced persons' camp in Germany. His search provides an opportunity for the film to show a variety of people who are living in such camps, often desperate to leave for a new life elsewhere. By implication, the suffering caused to these unfortunates is ultimately the responsibility of the Germans. However many are German speakers, whether of Austrian, Czech or German origin is never made clear. The film thus gives its audience an ambiguous message: these people are in the situation they are because of German actions; on the other hand, many of these people would seem to be German. This reflects the events which occurred after the end of the war, when minority German populations in many countries were forcibly expelled, an action which would now be described as 'ethnic cleansing'.

Hendlmann (Herbert Lom) initially appears quite a sympathetic character, despite the impression from Hildegarde's behaviour that he is somewhat tyrannical. He speaks

good English and politely deals with Lawrence's enquiries. Questioned about his antecedents, Hendlmann states that he is from the Sudetenland, was five years a political prisoner in Ravensbruck, while his wife and daughter spent two years in Auschwitz. When asked whether Hildegard is his daughter or step-daughter, he brushes the query aside, smiling. He agrees there is a resemblance between Hildegard and the photograph of his wife which Menzel has given Lawrence. Hendlmann describes the horrific confusion of the final days of the war. The family wish to go to England, for which Hendlmann expresses a liking. When asked about Reid's dying words, Hendlmann suggests that Hildegard, an amnesiac, has forgotten the horrors of the camps because her brain will not let her remember. Throughout the interview Hendlmann answers Lawrence's questions in an apparently open manner and seems very much in control.

Later Hendlmann interrupts a meeting between Lawrence and Hildegard. He apologises, explaining he is worried about the girl: in the camp, there is a need to be careful because it is not a civilised place, there are men there who do not see a young girl as deserving of respect – which could be seen as a polite doubting of Lawrence's motives.

When Hildegard goes missing from the camp Hendlmann accuses Lawrence of having kidnapped her and confronts the major, angrily demanding to know where his daughter is. Both the Camp Leader and Ferguson, a Quaker working with the refugees, think that Lawrence might know about the girl. Endeavouring to obtain information, Lawrence speaks to the camp 'gossip', Ackermann (Philo Hauser), who is initially very cautious but is prepared to barter information for cigarettes. Hendlmann has crept into the room and begins to bid, behind the Englishman's back, for Ackermann's silence,



but he cannot outbid Lawrence. Ackermann then tells how initially Hendlmann supported Reid's painting of Hildegarde: it resulted in cigarettes (the camp currency, the film makes clear) for him and presents for Hildegarde. Implicit in this information is that Hendlmann's regard for Hildegarde's reputation was not so careful where Reid was concerned. Then Hendlmann became concerned that something was wrong, and asked Ackermann to spy on the pair. Reid was trying to make the girl remember something she had forgotten. A long flashback sequence shows Hildegarde and Reid. She is dressed in a very traditional German costume of dirndl skirt, headscarf, a light-coloured blouse with turned up sleeves. Asked about her past, she appears very uncomfortable about recollecting it. When Ackermann relays this information to Hendlmann he forbids Hildegarde to pose for Reid any more.

During a confrontation between the two, Hendlmann tells Reid that the latter upsets Hildegarde, he (her father) does not want her memory brought back. Reid pulls a gun on him, but Hendlmann is unperturbed: 'Do not be stupid. I have long since lost any fear of death'. When Hildegarde comes in, she tells Reid she does not want to remember, her father is right.

The film returns to the present, and the two men give Ackermann his cigarettes and leave. Hendlmann is still there, however, and proceeds to attack the other with his fists. He later leaves the camp in a furtive manner, and is trailed by Ackermann to a concealed bunker where Hildegarde is hidden. Hendlmann becomes aware of Ackermann's presence and an effective sequence shows Ackermann cowering in the bushes while Hendlmann waits by the bunker door, stock-still, listening. The church clock indicates the passing of time. Hendlmann is dangerously patient. Ackermann loses his nerve and runs back towards the camp. Hendlmann follows and stabs him.

Just as it is decided to call off the search for Hildegarde, searchers return, having found Ackermann, barely alive, and also a key with a swastika symbol for the lock mechanism. Hendlmann is interrogated, and when the leader shows him the key, claims not to know what it is. However one of the other men has seen such a thing before: it is the key to a deep shelter, the sort of refuge that only the 'high ups' knew about. The search is renewed, this time looking for a bunker. When this is found and opened, an unconscious Hildegarde falls out; she has been behind the door desperately trying to escape.

Back at the leader's office, Lawrence asks Hildegarde how she got in the bunker and she claims not to know. He then shows her some items from Lidia's childhood which Menzel has sent him, a doll and a music box. Hildegarde recognises these and her memory begins to return, she gave the doll to 'my father', then turning to Hendlmann, 'To my father, not to you'. She also recognises the tune which the music box plays. Hendlmann, confronted by the box, denies all knowledge of it, which, given Hildegarde's obvious acquaintance with the object, indicates that he is lying. Lawrence tricks Frau Hendlmann into telling the truth about her 'husband'. Fritz Kottler was in the SS and is a wanted war criminal. The film ends with Lawrence visiting a rather flirtatious Hildegarde (now Lidia) in hospital. She is anxious to go to England and see her real father. Her conversation with Lawrence suggests a budding romance between the two.

As has already been stated, it is not immediately clear to the audience how many of the film's German speakers are German nationals and how many Austrians or Czechs.

Hendlmann/Kottler can be seen to be a stereotypical German character. He is dictatorial in his treatment of both his 'wife' and 'daughter'. He is very controlled – his



whole demeanour towards Lawrence is polite even if faintly hostile. He is a ruthless man, quick to attack Ackermann and to kill him when it appears necessary. His being a wanted war criminal suggests responsibility for atrocities. His behaviour to Hildegard/Lidia is very cruel: he uses her for his own purposes, deliberately obstructs any attempt to help her remember her true identity, and ultimately is prepared to leave her to die in the bunker rather than risk being exposed. Despite his expressed concerns for her virtue to Lawrence, his early conduct towards her posing for Reid suggests that he was unconcerned for what happened to her so long as he obtained some form of material recompense for his co-operation. He only became concerned about her relationship with Reid when it became clear that Reid was trying to help her recover her lost memory. He is, apparently, a dedicated Nazi. However, there is no suggestion in the film that he is trying to re-establish a Nazi regime in Germany: like Bruckner in *Counterblast* he appears to be more concerned for saving his own skin than for anything else. However, the existence of a character who is a former member of the SS, and the story of the sufferings of the Menzel family remind the audience of the horrors of the Hitler regime for which the Germans were, directly or indirectly, responsible.

The film shows several instances of the British and Germans working together, for example the Camp Leader at Hendlmann's camp is co-operative with Lawrence, is shown as running the camp fairly, and as having genuine concern for Hildegard's welfare. Ackermann is depicted as an undesirable – his spying activities, and his happily trading of information about his fellows for personal gain. Other Germans are shown as suffering the deprivations consequent upon defeat.

There is no evidence that the film was at all popular, and the critics' reactions were not particularly favourable. *Today's Cinema* damned the film with faint praise: 'Fair popular entertainment', 'hardly makes for gripping drama', 'the proceedings are somewhat desultory'. Herbert Lom's performance was described as 'sterling collaboration', while there was unreserved praise for Mai Zetterling<sup>871</sup>. The *Evening News* agreed: 'within its modest proportions it is notable and might have been exceptional'; again Mai Zetterling's performance was praised<sup>872</sup>. Both the *Daily Herald*, 'convincing done, its suspense is a shade too gentle', and 'stalwart male acting is well balanced by the luminous personality of Miss Zetterling'<sup>873</sup>, and the *Daily Express*, 'a tense little film, with Miss Zetterling giving her best as a touchingly lovely waif', concurred<sup>874</sup>. The *News Chronicle* was more damning, 'a harmless little magazine romance that could be looked at by anyone feeling especially well fed and content', and also mentioned 'that unhappy villain and escaped Nazi war criminal, Herbert Lom'<sup>875</sup>. Harold Conway also praised Lom's performance: 'Herbert Lom plays this last part with a dramatic force which is quite uncomfortable; effectively supported by Philo Hauser, as a camp reptile in human form'<sup>876</sup>. *Monthly Film Bulletin* was more complimentary, describing the film as 'interesting and contains drama, thrills and suspense, together with sufficient relief, little humorous touches, and realistic glimpses of camp life', and the fact that 'Hendlmann is a notorious SS man' was noted<sup>877</sup>. For the *Daily Worker* the film was 'thoroughly satisfactory entertainment, if on conventional lines'<sup>878</sup>. Both *The Times*<sup>879</sup> and the *Evening Standard*<sup>880</sup> appreciated the picture of life in a DP camp.

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<sup>871</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.71, No.5741, 17 December 1948, pp.6-7.

<sup>872</sup> *Evening News*, 16 December 1948.

<sup>873</sup> *Daily Herald*, 17 December 1948.

<sup>874</sup> *Daily Express*, 17 December 1948.

<sup>875</sup> *News Chronicle*, 20 December 1948.

<sup>876</sup> Harold Conway, *Evening Standard*, 16 December 1948.

<sup>877</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol.16, No.181, 1 January 1949, pp.3-4.

<sup>878</sup> *Daily Worker* 18 December 1948.

<sup>879</sup> *The Times*, 20 December 1948.



Later films showed a rather more favourable picture of the Germans. In 1953, Carol Reed's *The Man Between* was released. This film is set in contemporary Berlin, and its main character, something of an anti-hero, is a German. However, the film takes a tolerant view of this flawed man.

The film concerns a British girl, Susanne (Claire Bloom), who comes to Berlin to stay with her brother, Martin (Geoffrey Toone) and his German wife, Bettina (Hildegard Knef). The initial presentation of English and German is differentiated. Bettina, who has been shown nervously tapping a beer mat on a table watched by a small boy (Dieter Krause) in outsized trousers and a cap, wears a black coat, pulled tight to her figure with a leather belt, and a small black hat with a veil – perhaps implying she has something to conceal. Her gloves are white, providing a strong contrast with her other clothes. She is the typical Aryan blonde. Susanne, on the other hand, is dark, with a lighter-coloured coat, full and floating with a large collar. The effect is of a much younger woman than Bettina; throughout the film, reference is made to Susanne's youth and naiveté<sup>881</sup>. Bettina in a later scene warns Susanne about Ivo, gently suggesting she is more worldly-wise than the other: 'there is not much difference in our ages, but a hundred years in how we've lived'. Ivo describes Susanne several times as a 'child'.

The film follows Susanne as she becomes acquainted with a 'friend' of Bettina's, Ivo Kern (James Mason) and gradually falls in love with him, despite her concerns about what she thinks is Bettina's affair with the man. It transpires that Kern is a racketeer making a precarious living between the East and West, and that he was married to

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<sup>880</sup> *Evening Standard*, 16 December 1948.

<sup>881</sup> See Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties: Gender, Genre and the New Look*, London, Routledge, 2000, pp.99-100.

Bettina, who, having heard nothing from him since 1943, assumed he was dead. The boy with the bicycle, Horst, acts as his spy. Ivo is being blackmailed by Hälender (Aribert Wäscher). Hälender is trying to capture Olaf Kastner (Ernst Schröder) who acts as a spy and agent for the West, bringing across from the East both people and information; knowing that Kastner is a friend of the Mallinsons, Hälender hopes to use Bettina to obtain information leading to Kastner's detention. This leads to Susanne being kidnapped and taken to the East by Hälender (in mistake for Bettina). Ivo engineers her escape and they spend one night together, during which she seduces him and he tries to resist, aware of his unsuitability as a lover, before they are picked up by Kastner who takes them to the border. Here suspicious guards threaten to thwart the escape, and Ivo sacrifices himself to save Susanne and Kastner. He is shot as he runs desperately after the fleeing van, his last vain movements a crawl towards the western side.

Unlike earlier films seeking to rehabilitate the Germans, which used a woman as the vehicle for a plea for tolerance and understanding, *The Man Between* shows good German men, Kastner in particular. In appearance he is very Teutonic: a plump-faced, burly man with blonde hair. However, he is heroic for his forays into the eastern sector, events which he describes with endearing modesty as 'I just go to and fro'. He is also the only person in the police station to show some sympathy for Susanne's predicament as she is persuaded to help to trap the man she loves, commenting to her that it is 'A pity, he seemed like a nice fellow'. He trusts that Ivo's message asking him to collect himself and Susanne is genuine and not a trap, and he is fair towards Ivo, recognising that he must bring him back to the West, however difficult the situation this will place Bettina in.



Ivo is shown as a deeply flawed character. He offers to tell Susanne stories about his life, his estate in East Prussia, his collection of paintings over which he is suing the French government, 'My deeds of valour during the war which I've told so often that I almost believe them myself'. Later, while they are hiding in a flat in East Berlin waiting to be rescued, he tells her the truth about himself. After the war he was involved in petty crime, stealing passports, petrol scams, some form of firearms business. It is clear that in his case cynicism is the last refuge of the idealist: he trained as a lawyer and came out of university 'full of bright ideas and beliefs' to find that this was all out of date (by implication because the Nazis had taken power). 'One day the law simply vanished...Justice, the rights of man, trial by jury, protection of the innocent – all that nonsense'. He describes his Army career: 'I was an efficient unit in the military machine'; he plundered Holland and France; watched hostages being shot; was involved as a village near Prague was razed to the ground. Her answer: 'But you were ordered'. Ivo refuses the absolution offered: he did not ask her to judge that he is innocent. But how could he now stand up in court 'and prattle about the rights of man'. After the war 'I didn't have the courage or the stamina to live decently'. In the character of Ivo, the film invites understanding and redemption for the ordinary German soldier, who may have fought for Hitler, may even have been involved in atrocities, but who had, the film implies, little choice. In the scene in the flat, the film comes close to allowing that 'obeying orders' is a defence.

Ivo, the man who complies with the regime but eventually redeems himself by a good action and his death in accomplishing it, is a familiar device from earlier films, as the characters of Degan in *Pastor Hall*, Irene in *Freedom Radio* or Vogel in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* indicate. The audience is left in doubt as to the degree of Ivo's complicity with the regime. He is shown to be an accomplished liar, as his boast to Susanne about his

stories shows. He is a flawed human being, an idealist who has fallen into a state of desperate cynicism. His *mea culpa* to Susanne might be seen as an exaggeration of his faults; throughout the scene in the East German apartment he seems anxious to quench Susanne's love for him and he may portray himself in the blackest possible way for that reason. His attempts to kill her affection for him indicate that there is good in him, he does not want her to waste her life on someone like him. The fondness shown to him by Horst and his offhand concern for the boy also reveal a good side.

Bettina is the third major West German character. She also has her faults, principally her failure to 'come clean' to her husband the moment Ivo approached her for information. This does not appear to be because of any great concern about the strength of her relationship with Martin. She kept quiet to protect him: 'If I haven't been very sensible, darling, it's because I love you and because I wanted to protect you from all this dirt'. She feared that public knowledge of the invalidity of their marriage would ruin his military career. Two little scenes show a deep bond between the two. When her husband confirms that they are not legally married, he touches her shoulder: 'Makes it all rather romantic, doesn't it?', not the remark of a man who is deeply worried about the situation. The following scene shows the two together, she sitting with her head resting on her hands, he behind her. She is smiling and asks what he intends to do 'now that you know we're not properly married', pointing out that he could leave. He responds that they will have to sort the position out, legalise their situation. She, with a slow, seductive smile, suggests that he needs to ask her first, which he does. They can joke about their predicament, both sure of the other's response. Theirs is a strong Anglo-German partnership<sup>882</sup>.

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<sup>882</sup> Christine Geraghty sees Bettina's comment of 'You are free' to Martin as 'self-abnegation' (Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, pp.99-100). I argue that the way the scene is played, Bettina's attitude displays no lack of confidence in Martin's response, she teases him with the possibility that she could refuse him.



Hälender, the East German, in appearance is a short, plump, middle-aged, balding man wearing a beret. His manner is unattractive, ingratiating when he is trying to wheedle information out of Susanne, swiftly switching to bullying and threats when she shows suspicion of him. Ivo describes him as a gangster, not part of the government, but he appears to have some official connections judging by the speed with which he can activate the East German police when Susanne and Ivo escape.

The divided city of Berlin is a brooding background presence in the film, with emphasis placed on the desire of East Berliners to come to the West: Susanne's first glimpse of the city is of a group of people who are refugees from the East; Martin has an emergency at the hospital because of an influx of eastern refugees. On a trip to the East, Bettina explains the ties that keep people there, the implication being that they do not stay because of a liking for the Communist regime. The trip gives a chance to show East Berlin as markedly different from the West: there are more ruins and rubble; Stalin's portrait and that of Walter Ulbricht are everywhere; the café is shabby with slogans on the walls. We see *Trümmelfrauen* clearing rubble, not men as in the West. West Berlin appears for the most part like a modern European city. In the bar where Ivo meets Susanne in the West there are no slogans on the walls and in the background is a dresser decorated with a collection of beer mugs. However, in the area around Bettina's house, right by the Brandenburg Gate and the divide between East and West, is still a wasteland of rubble although it is being cleared

There is still a dual perception of the Germans, but the 'bad' side is displaced to the East, the Communist enemy. Various elements suggest an affinity between the former Nazi regime and that now operating in the East. The various slogans on the walls and

the ubiquity of the pictures of Communist leaders could be seen as emphasising a similarity with the omnipresence of portraits of Hitler in British depictions of Nazi Germany. The East German regime oppresses the people (echoing ideas present in both *Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio*). The police and border guards are a threatening presence, not a protective one; the police inspector in the West appears like an English policeman. Whereas in *Portrait from Life* authority lies with the British major who deals with the problem of Hendlmann, in *The Man Between* it is the German policeman and Kastner himself who deal with Ivo and the results of Hälender's kidnapping of Susanne. The kidnapping activities of the East German authorities, or their representatives, and the description of Hälender as a gangster again echo the view of the Nazis as a bunch of gangsters<sup>883</sup>.

Some critics enjoyed the film. For Reg Whitley, it was 'a brilliant blend of romance and intrigue', Claire Bloom's performance was 'first-rate', 'her love scenes with Mason are very well played', and he also saw Dieter Krause as the 'talking-point' of the film<sup>884</sup>. *Reynolds News*, while acknowledging that it was a 'gloomy film', still saw it as 'always gripping and often superb'<sup>885</sup>. Gerald Bowman admired the film, seeing the story as 'clever, and although frankly outspoken in its record of the tension between Allied and Soviet areas of the city, it is not political in theme... brilliantly worked out but is so carried by intrigues, kidnappings and border incidents that it may well match Sir Carol's *The Third Man* for intensity of drama'<sup>886</sup>. Peter Burnup concurred<sup>887</sup>.

Alone among the more 'high-brow' critics, Dilys Powell praised the film, beginning

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<sup>883</sup> See Landy, *British Film Genres*, p.184. For Landy, the film reflects the changing nature of the international scene between *The Third Man*, 1949, and 1953. West Germany was by 1953 an important ally in the Cold War stand-off with the Communist Bloc, and would, in 1955, become a partner in NATO. Landy's comments emphasise how the East Germans in Reed's film have taken on attributes associated with the Nazis, the view of the whole regime as 'gangsters', and the lack of interest in any motive except a generalised malevolence.

<sup>884</sup> Reg Whitley, *Daily Mirror*, 25 September 1953.

<sup>885</sup> *Reynolds News*, 2 September 1953.

<sup>886</sup> Gerald Bowman, *Evening News*, 16 September 1953.

<sup>887</sup> Peter Burnup, *News of the World*, 27 September 1953.



her review by saying that: 'Before I discuss in any detail *The Man Between*...I want to say that I enjoyed it, admired it, never found it dull and should have liked more of it'. She noted that Reed had invited comparison between this film and *The Third Man*, both dealing with cities divided and under occupation. For Powell, as for some other critics, the city of Berlin itself was a powerful presence in the film, 'this savage townscape'<sup>888</sup>. She criticised the lack of coherence in the plot, blaming in part the scriptwriter (Harry Kurnitz) for not providing Reed with 'solid stuff'. She praised the acting, especially 'James Mason's agreeable German rascal'<sup>889</sup>. As might be expected of a trade paper, *Today's Cinema* thought the film 'high-grade thriller entertainment and obvious box-office winner', noting the 'topicality and authenticity of its setting'<sup>890</sup>.

Many critics had good things to say about the film, while withholding outright approval. *The Spectator* saw both *The Third Man* and *The Man Between* as having similar backgrounds and 'the atmosphere of disillusionment, fear and corruption' which would lead inevitably to the audience comparing them. The story evolved 'in a not always lucid manner', and failed to 'produce any feeling of tension' although 'James Mason's performance as the lawyer turned racketeer could not be bettered, a cynical rather than a sinister villain'<sup>891</sup>. Roy Nash also compared *The Man Between* with *The Third Man* and found it wanting. 'Ivo, an ex-lawyer morally blasted by Nazi injustice, deals in human beings, a seedy East Berlin rat who slips across the rubble frontier to arrange kidnappings for his Red masters'<sup>892</sup>. Fred Majdalany, while noting that the film had 'innumerable Reed touches', 'the fundamental requirement of every film – a good story about interesting people – isn't there'. He thought well of Mason,

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<sup>888</sup> See also Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 1953 and Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, Vol.23, No.3, 1 January 1954, p.144.

<sup>889</sup> Dilys Powell, *The Sunday Times*, 27 September 1953.

<sup>890</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol. 81, No. 6849, 23 September 1953, p.14.

<sup>891</sup> *The Spectator*, 25 September 1953.

<sup>892</sup> Roy Nash, *Daily Star*, 25 September 1953. See also *The Times*, 23 September 1953, *Evening Standard*, 24 September 1953, Ray Nunn, *Daily Sketch*, 22 September 1953.

`...without getting too much help from the script, he manages to build up a lively mixture of crook, cynic, scapegrace, and Lothario. There is always vitality and tension when he is about`. He liked Hildegard Neff, `in the old tradition of sensuously beautiful, deep-voiced German stars who contrive to suggest steel and drowsiness at the same time`<sup>893</sup>. Campbell Dixon had his reservations but thought it `an interesting film` and `on the whole, the acting is admirable. James Mason, always fond of an equivocal role, revels in Ivo`s dash and schadenfreude; Miss Neff and the other Germans – Aribert Waescher, Ernest Schroeder and little Dieter Krause in particular, are very good indeed...`<sup>894</sup>.

A number of critics disliked the film. *Monthly Film Bulletin* echoed comments already quoted that better things were expected of Reed, blaming `an implausibly contrived and dully written script`. Of Ivo Kern, the reviewer stated:

This man operates as a racketeer in an uneasy city with arbitrary frontiers, yet somewhere there is a residue of decency in him; the sheltered English girl who falls in love with him, the young boy on the bicycle who watches and spies for him with absolute devotion, seem both to have discerned it. The writing, though, offers only a few clichés on this vital point, and the result is that, in spite of James Mason`s very competent performance, the character remains flat and unconvincing<sup>895</sup>.

Penelope Houston also blamed the script and Claire Bloom`s `most disappointing performance`, suggesting that Reed `has not chosen to investigate the moral and political implications of the story – these never emerge from the background`. She

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<sup>893</sup> Fred Majdalany, *Daily Mail*, 25 September 1953.

<sup>894</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 26 September 1953.

<sup>895</sup> *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Vol .25, No. 238, 1 November 1953, p.159.



noted the fact that Ivo Kern is a more sympathetic character than Lime, 'a racketeer whose impulses towards honesty are made all the more apparent by the cynical bravado with which he conceals them'<sup>896</sup>. For William Whitebait, the film was 'enormously ...skilled as a piece of film-making, yet how empty!...The script never really gets going at all, nor do the characters, except, perhaps, for Mason's kidnapper'. He complained of Reed, 'Hasn't he – or have we – had enough of his men between, beside, and beyond, with a bullet in them'<sup>897</sup>. For Paul Holt, 'This film is a fake. It pretends to be what it is not. It starts off as a sinister thriller, but ends up as a common chase-drama. Scene is in post-war Berlin, full of sinister figures lurking in the ruins'. He disliked the love interest: 'This is the most improbable love scene I have ever seen on the screen. For this rash act - I could see no other sin he [Ivo Kern] committed during the course of the film - he is condemned by Sir Carol Reed to be shot to death in the snow by frontier guards'<sup>898</sup>. This seems a somewhat perverse reading of Reed's Ivo: I would argue that Ivo is shown to have had a dubious wartime record and to have been a crook, albeit a crook with a conscience – a view which many other critics of the time seem to endorse.

This was undoubtedly a prestigious film, made by a celebrated British director and starring James Mason, who had become a popular star in the 1940s for his roles in Gainsborough melodramas and here playing a part similar to those he played in *The Man in Grey* and *The Wicked Lady*. However, the critics who found it disappointing were right in their assessment in that it failed to achieve great success at the box office, not meriting a mention in Josh Billings' evaluation of the films of 1953<sup>899</sup>. Perhaps for that reason, it is not much discussed in the literature.

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<sup>896</sup> Penelope Houston, *Sight and Sound*, Vol.23, No.3, 1 January 1954, p.144.

<sup>897</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 3 October, 1953.

<sup>898</sup> Paul Holt, *Daily Herald*, 25 September 1953.

<sup>899</sup> Josh Billings, *Kine Weekly*, No.2425, 17 December 1953, pp.10-11

Christine Geraghty, writing from a gender perspective, notes the role of Hildegard Neff in relation to the sexual politics of the time, where European women represented a more sensual image than that of British women. However, she sees Bettina concealing not only a sexual past with Ivo `but also a political one, although as is typical that remains much more shadowy. Ivo, Bettina finally admits, has “appeared out of the ruins of Berlin”, and it becomes clear that he acts as a reminder of her nationality, as well as her sexuality`. For Geraghty, Bettina is a female equivalent of Ivo, between the two worlds of west and east. `Ivo claims her not directly as his wife but as a fellow national: “You`re a Berliner still, aren`t you if only in name?”. Later it is assumed by one of the East German villains that she will be loyal: “She is a German woman no matter who she has married since”<sup>900</sup>. This view echoes the Vansittart concept that all Germans are one, united by common blood which outweighs all other loyalties; this in *The Man Between* is linked to those characters from the East, which in the film, I have argued, shares characteristics with the Nazi state.

The film also makes clear that those in West Berlin do not identify themselves with the East. Bettina may cross the border with ease, and escort her sister-in-law on a visit to the East, but she shows no signs of wishing to remain there. She is conscious of risks attached to crossing the border – her comment to Susanne that it is better if they are not seen to be speaking English. Ivo draws attention to the diametrically opposed views which he and Bettina hold. Kastner actively works against the East. The film emphasises that people flee as refugees into the West, despite the ties which may encourage them to stay in the East (as Bettina points out to Susanne in the café). Despite her concealment of who Ivo is, Bettina never appears to be tempted to help

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<sup>900</sup> Christine Geraghty, *British Cinema in the Fifties*, pp.99-100.



him, and her love and loyalty are depicted as being to her British husband, not Ivo. Bettina's past is questionable, but that would apply to any German not known as an anti-Nazi. I do not think the film suggests Bettina is concealing dark secrets, apart from the re-emergence of her supposed dead husband. Her problem is couched in terms of her marital status – Ivo's being alive renders her marriage to Martin invalid. That this difficulty does not disturb their relationship unduly is emphasised: Martin is keen to regularise their position as soon as possible

Charles Crichton's 1954 film, *The Divided Heart* was based on a real case<sup>901</sup>. It shows the Hartl family, Inga (Cornell Borchers), Franz (Armin Dahlen) and Toni (Michel Ray), who live in an idyllic mountain village in south Germany, St.Johann in Tyrol: the year is 1952. The film tells the story of a German couple who adopted a little boy during the war on the assurance that he was an orphaned German child, only to be informed that his mother is still alive and that he is a Yugoslav forcibly taken from her during the German occupation. Now the child has been traced she wants her baby back. A court case ensues to decide whether the 'blood mother' or the 'bread mother' should have custody of the lad. During the court scenes the audience is shown Sonia Slavko's (Yvonne Mitchell) story in flashback: a husband who helped the partisans and was executed by the Germans; her daughters taken away and never seen again; her baby removed from her and herself taken to Auschwitz.

A later flashback shows the Hartls' side of the story. Offered a choice of two boys at the orphanage Inga takes the withdrawn, nervous child instead of the more outgoing little boy whom Franz favours. When it becomes clear Toni is frightened of her husband (a later scene establishes that the child is afraid of uniforms), Franz willingly

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<sup>901</sup> *The Times Education Supplement*, 19 November 1954.

spends the last night of his leave before he returns to the Russian Front separated from his wife. Inga takes the boy home to their little house in the country where there is a room ready for him, complete with a rocking horse – perhaps made by Franz who appears to be a carpenter. She even has a rabbit in a hutch as a pet for Toni. However Toni remains withdrawn, unable to cry, until Inga receives news that Franz is missing, believed killed. When she breaks down, Toni cries too and thereafter behaved like an ordinary boy. At the end of the war Inga and Toni had to flee their home and make their way to Germany, perhaps an implication that they are Sudeten Germans. She worked her way until she came to their present village where she supported herself and the boy for five years until Franz was released from his imprisonment by the Russians.

The court orders that Toni should get to know his natural mother, claiming the most important factor influencing their decision is the boy's future and his wishes. After an awkward initial meeting, natural mother and son strike up a good relationship. Sonia comes to know the Hartls and to understand their love for their son, and offers to leave him with them, she cannot take him away from everything he loves. Inga, who initially was desperate to keep her child no matter what, now sees this as wrong, 'Giving and taking are another sort of running away', and the decision is left to the judges. Despite Toni's almost hysterical demand to be left with his adopted parents, the judges decide by a majority of two to one to give Sonia custody. Given what has been said earlier about the defining consideration being the boy's welfare, this seems a somewhat perverse decision. Toni/Ivan wishes to remain with his adopted parents. He cannot speak his birth mother's language and will be going 'home' to a foreign country. One judge suggests that Toni will soon adapt to life in a new country, the other assumes that the son will in adulthood care for his mother. The judges' reasons for giving custody to Sonia seem less motivated by concern for the boy than by an assumption that Sonia



should have her child back in recompense for the suffering she has endured. Many in the British audience would have experienced sending their children off into the care of strangers during the evacuation of children out of Britain's large cities during the war; the judges' decision would have seemed more reasonable to them, no doubt, than it does to a modern audience. After a prolonged farewell scene with Inga and Franz, we see Toni and Sonia in the train on their way back to Yugoslavia, the boy looking after his mother, sorting out the tickets and so on, as one of the judges suggested he would.

The film does not gloss over German atrocities in the Balkans or Sonia's suffering. We see the events which led to the loss of her boy. The Child Repatriation Officer makes clear the suffering which German policies in Occupied Europe have caused. A man needs to be unemotional, otherwise he would 'drown in the tears'. He tells the Hartls how children were brought from all over Europe, put in *Lebensborn* homes, given to German families as German children. Inga is horrified, 'Mother of God, why is there a war?'. Franz has suffered as a prisoner of the Russians, separated from his wife for five years. While there is some suggestion of German xenophobia in the reactions of some of the village children to the possibility that Toni is a foreigner, this attitude is not condoned by the adults. The later pelting of Sonia with snowballs would seem to be less provoked by her alien status than because she is threatening to take Toni away, and the skiing sequence shows that this dislike is not universal. However Sonia is distanced because she speaks in Slovene. We learn little of her, except for what is learnt from the flashback sequence of how she comes to be reclaiming her son. Her situation demands audience sympathy, but it is the heartrending situation of the Hartls which is emphasised.

The film is very sympathetic to Inga and Franz Hartl. The story is seen, mostly, from their viewpoint. They speak English throughout. The final scenes create a poignant contrast between the couple, left alone without their much-loved child, and Sonia's and Ivan's developing companionship. The film emphasises that the Hartls are victims of the Nazi state in the same way that Sonia is, although they have not lost so much. The couple have innocently adopted a child they thought was an orphaned German baby – this claim of theirs is never questioned. Inga has lavished care and love on the boy, probably saving his sanity in the process – the audience is left in no doubt that the infant Toni is a seriously withdrawn child. She undertook her flight from her original home, protecting him along the way, and refusing an offer from a couple to look after him until she had found somewhere permanent to live because he did not want to be separated from her. Franz had endured a long period of imprisonment in the USSR, and was only released because he became ill. Inga and Franz are not presented as anti-Nazi – indeed their political allegiances during the period of the Third Reich are never raised; the audience is invited to relate to them as victims of the Hitler regime, as innocent in their way as Sonia and her family were in theirs. It is a much more sympathetic portrait of Germans than had been usual in British films.

While using a woman as the vehicle through which sympathy is invited for the German people, Franz, the wartime Wehrmacht soldier, is also presented as an admirable character. He is depicted as a quiet, unaggressive, extremely reasonable man. He is sensitive to the feelings of others – he instantly suggests getting a separate room when Toni's fear of him becomes obvious. He faces up to Germany's actions during the wartime period and takes some responsibility – he specifically points out to Inga the fact that Germans were responsible for the fate of the boy's father and mother, and that Toni/Ivan would be entitled to question his adopted parents' actions. The film does



raise the question of whether his philosophical approach to the matter is due to his lack of personal attachment to Toni – both in the scene at the orphanage, when his preference for the more outgoing little boy is clear, and in Inga's accusation that he has only known Toni for two years, and cannot therefore feel as she does. But nothing in the way his interaction with Toni is shown would indicate a lack of affection.

The film appears to have provoked an emotional reaction among the critics. Harold Conway claimed 'This film made Fleet Street cry...many critics – myself included – wept unashamedly at the private showing'. He stated that: 'A story unexampled in its human, heart-breaking quality has been screened with dignity and art'<sup>902</sup>. The critic of the *Sunday Express* was also moved to tears, seeing the film as 'full of dignity, integrity and tenderness'. The acting skills of Cornell Borchers and Yvonne Mitchell were praised<sup>903</sup>. H. Deane was reduced to tears, and noted the tears of the 'six usherettes'<sup>904</sup>. Peter Burnup named it 'the picture of the week...a lovely and lovable film'. 'It's a film which infallibly will clutch at the heartstrings of any man or woman'. He also praised the performances, including that of Michel Ray as Toni<sup>905</sup>. This approval was echoed by C.A. Lejeune, who saw 'the shining merit' of the film in 'its truth'<sup>906</sup>. Leonard Mosley made the obvious comparison with the Judgement of Solomon, urging his readers to 'see a moving and intense film', promising them 'you will weep'<sup>907</sup>. Dilys Powell considered that 'the balance of sympathy is sensitively held between the German who has sacrificed so much to make the boy her own, and the mother who has

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<sup>902</sup> Harold Conway, *Daily Sketch*, 10 November 1954.

<sup>903</sup> *Sunday Express*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>904</sup> H. Deane, *Sunday Dispatch*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>905</sup> Peter Burnup, *News of the World*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>906</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>907</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 11 November 1954. This was also mentioned by the *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1954.

lost everything in her life except her son'. She also admired the playing of the two main women, while singling out Yvonne Mitchell for particular praise<sup>908</sup>.

There were those who found elements to criticise. William Whitebait commented: 'It isn't often, in British films, that one finds a painful and humanitarian theme treated with dignity. We mean well, but feel uneasy, summoning up either a documentary grimness or letting reality slip away in an ooze of sentiment'. He considered *The Divided Heart* avoided these pitfalls. However, he complained of 'emotional clichés, dramatic overstatements', and concluded 'I couldn't help thinking that if the setting had been nearer home, the people and accents and words all English, *The Divided Heart* might not have come off quite as it does'<sup>909</sup>. The *Manchester Guardian* praised the film for its sincerity, and noted its 'attention to linguistic and geographical detail, sometimes with touches of genuine film craftsmanship and always with integrity and a delicate absence of sentimental melodrama'. Yet, for this critic, 'it remains "a case" and "a problem" and except in fleeting moments...it never quite comes to life'. The writer blames the film-makers for being 'intent not so much on bringing characters to life as on making "types" to suit their problem'. He did praise the performances, especially that of Yvonne Mitchell<sup>910</sup>. The *Daily Worker* regarded the film as 'most distinguished...a moving and often impressive film...It is polished, most intelligently acted and directed'. However 'it has a serious flaw'. For Thomas Spencer,

the film is...misconceived in identifying itself too closely and uncritically with the German point of view.

It is not the story of the Yugoslav woman who has suffered terribly at the hands of the Nazi invaders and at last is able to rebuild part of her life by having her

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<sup>908</sup> Dilys Powell, *The Sunday Times*, 14 November 1954.

<sup>909</sup> William Whitebait, *New Statesman*, 20 November 1954.

<sup>910</sup> *Manchester Guardian*, 13 November 1954.



one surviving child restored to her. It is the story of a nice German couple who suddenly lose their child.

He noted the language `tangle. All the German characters...speak English, while the Yugoslav mother...speaks nothing but Slovene`. He had a more fundamental criticism:

More serious is the tacit acceptance of the self-pitying German standpoint.

There is no hint that the German family knew about the Nazi atrocities.

Yet without quite realising it the film condones in the German family some of the very qualities that made Auschwitz possible – a certain resentment that others don't fully appreciate their virtues, a tendency to make a virtue of ignorance of affairs beyond the village, an underlying selfishness and callousness springing from lack of imagination<sup>911</sup>.

Some of these criticisms seem biased. While the family's knowledge of Nazi atrocities is not emphasised, the Yugoslav mother's narrative of her suffering is never questioned – Nazi atrocities are accepted as a fact. Inga is a mother fighting for the child she loves, against a stranger. In the end both she and Sonia show equal concern for the boy's future: Sonia is prepared to abandon her claim, an offer Inga refuses which, the film shows, costs her her child. It is fair to say that the film invites sympathy for Germans. By 1954 it was desirable, even necessary, for animosity towards the German people to be quelled. While the film was not a propaganda vehicle by the British Government, it can be seen as reflecting a shift in opinion consequent upon a political change.

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<sup>911</sup> Thomas Spencer, *Daily Worker*, 13 November 1954.

A film which can be argued to relate to the problem of how to deal with the Germans, although not treating directly the question of Anglo-German relations, is *Rommel-Desert Fox* (Henry Hathaway, 1951), based on a book by a British Brigadier, Desmond Young, starring James Mason in the title role, and released in Britain in 1951. It is faithful to the image of Rommel depicted in Young's book, and thus can be said to put across a 'British' rather than a purely American view. It deals with an aspect of the desert war which *Desert Victory* ignored, as was inevitable in the wartime situation: the 'Rommel legend'. The German Field-Marshal was regarded with respect and even a certain amount of affection by many of the British troops who fought against him; he had a good reputation for fighting cleanly and treating prisoners well. Desmond Young had a personal reason for writing a biography of the Afrika Korps commander. After being captured in the desert, he had come across Rommel when the latter supported Young in a dispute with a German officer: 'I looked at the general and saw ... the ghost of a smile. At any rate his intervention seemed to be worth a salute'<sup>912</sup>. Rommel was sufficiently well regarded for Auchinleck to issue an order to his commanders asking them to 'dispel by all possible means the idea that Rommel represents something more than an ordinary German general'<sup>913</sup>.

The book was popular – *Picturegoer* stated that it sold 200,000 copies<sup>914</sup> – but it was also controversial. Reviewers were divided about its merits. *The Times Literary Supplement* reviewer, while acknowledging that there existed 'a simple spirit of comradeship-in-arms', regarded Young's portrayal as overly sympathetic to his former foe<sup>915</sup>. Malcolm Muggeridge was more scathing, regarding the late General's anti-Nazi stand as 'too little too late', and accusing him and other generals of only turning against

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<sup>912</sup> Young, *Rommel*, pp.14-15.

<sup>913</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>914</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.21, No.841, 16 June 1951, p.15.

<sup>915</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 February, 1950, p.99.



Hitler when the latter was losing the war. He also condemned the separation of the individual from the faults of the system, seeing this as undermining the re-education of Germany<sup>916</sup>. On the other hand the biography was the *Daily Mail*'s book of the month, the reviewer accepting the view of Rommel as 'brave, resolute, intelligent and honest'<sup>917</sup>, while E.T. Williams (a former Intelligence Officer to Montgomery) in the *Observer* commented that 'Rommel was, apparently, a man with much in him to admire: who practised a soldier's hard ethic, blinkered, non-political, and therefore, in total war – some would say – outmoded'<sup>918</sup>.

Unlike the book on which it was based, the film does not attempt to deal with the whole of Rommel's life: it focuses on his final two years, from his defeat at Alamein to his suicide in the autumn of 1944 following the July Plot of that year. His success in the desert war is not, however, ignored. The highly dramatic pre-credit sequence of a British Commando raid on Rommel's headquarters in 1941, which tried and failed to kill the General, establishes the importance of Rommel to the British; the film then continues with the scene of Young's capture, and Auchinleck's order which I have already quoted. There is also a sequence which stresses that Young's biography is based on thorough research, including the co-operation of Rommel's family.

The film traces Rommel's gradual disillusionment with Hitler, from excusing unreasonable orders as the work of the coterie surrounding the Führer, of whom he has no great opinion; to disgust at Hitler's abandonment of the Afrika Korps to capture; to despair when his efforts to persuade Hitler (Luther Adler) to adopt sensible tactics to counter the Allied invasion are met with ranting about new weapons and an accusation of cowardice. The film also indicates that Rommel was implicated in the July Plot,

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<sup>916</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 1950.

<sup>917</sup> Frank Owen, *Daily Mail*, 23 January 1950.

<sup>918</sup> E.T. Williams, *Observer*, 22 January 1950.

although the degree of his involvement in this has been debated. Finally the film shows the Field Marshal taking poison on Hitler's orders, not to avoid a show trial and inevitable conviction, a trial Rommel would welcome as a chance to speak out, but because if he avoids embarrassing the regime his wife and son will be left unmolested. The film ends with speculation about his last thoughts: did he look back to the desert and his exploits there? The final words are those of Winston Churchill, talking of 'respect because although a loyal German soldier he came to hate Hitler and all his works. In the sombre wars of modern life there is little place for chivalry'.

*Picturegoer* noted that this was an expensive production, 'a nothing-barred, spare-no-expense...story...Two million dollars were poured into the production'<sup>919</sup>. The film seems to have been popular – a later article in the same magazine refers to its having 'set up queue records in the West End'<sup>920</sup>. Josh Billings' annual survey for the year confirmed its popularity: '*Rommel – Desert Fox* looks like beating the lot, but it's only just started on its fabulous rounds'<sup>921</sup>. A popular film was likely to reach a wider audience than Young's book.

Like the book, the film had a mixed reception. Favourable reviews tended to acknowledge that there might be concerns about the portrayal. C.A. Lejeune noted that 'there will inevitably be voices raised in protest against the sympathetic, even heroic portrait of the German Field-Marshal...To my mind *Rommel*, looked at objectively, is a very fine cinema job indeed: powerful, swift, restrained, well acted, written by someone who understands the bite of words, and fully as exciting as the best detective story'. She also praised Mason's performance, while seeing it as 'eclipsed by Leo G.

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<sup>919</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol. 21, No.841, 16 June 1951, p.14.

<sup>920</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.22, No.863, 17 November 1951, p.13.

<sup>921</sup> Josh Billings, *Kine Weekly*, No.2321, 20 December, 1951, p.9.



Carroll's von Rundstedt, who has all the brightest dialogue lines'<sup>922</sup>. Campbell Dixon was rather more dismissive of opposition: 'Patriots who think their country best served by representing all enemies as cannibals and hyaenas may be annoyed, even alarmed, by *Rommel – Desert Fox*' and noted the good opinion of Rommel from Churchill and Auchinleck. He praised both the film as an action story and Mason's performance<sup>923</sup>. *Today's Cinema* described the film as 'arresting entertainment for patrons of all classes, with stand-out box-office pull on title and star ... finely imaginative reconstruction ... It blends the authenticity of the newsreel with the realism of documented history'<sup>924</sup>. Harry White acknowledged there was opposition to the film by critics, but argued that they had nothing to complain about: the film was based on a carefully researched book by a British officer; Rommel was a professional soldier – fighting 'on Hitler's orders ... doesn't make him a sinister Nazi'. Above all, it was good entertainment<sup>925</sup>.

Some critics considered the film good entertainment, but still had reservations about the sympathetic portrayal of its eponymous hero. *The Times* noted the strangeness of seeing the war from a German point-of-view, but the reviewer still thought it a good film, noting: 'And, if it be protested that it is a curious thing to make a hero and a legend out of an enemy, it must be remembered that the process was in full swing while our troops were actually engaged in fighting him...'<sup>926</sup>. Leonard Mosley described it as 'a sensational film ... brilliantly made, fiendishly well acted, tremendously exciting'. It made him angry for overdoing its admiration for 'that fantastic Nazi Field Marshal'. Yet Mosley still found the film worthwhile: '... it is a film you've got to see'<sup>927</sup>. The critic of the *Daily Mirror* echoed these views: 'Maybe some of the Desert Rats will

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<sup>922</sup> C.A. Lejeune, *Observer*, 14 October 1951. For praise of Carroll's performance, see also Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1951.

<sup>923</sup> Campbell Dixon, *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1951.

<sup>924</sup> *Today's Cinema*, Vol.77, No.6335, 12 September 1951, p.10.

<sup>925</sup> *Picturegoer*, Vol.22, No.863, 17 November 1951, pp.12-13.

<sup>926</sup> *The Times*, 10 October 1951.

<sup>927</sup> Leonard Mosley, *Daily Express*, 1 October 1951.

think he [Mason] makes Rommel too chivalrous and attractive a character. But that is hardly Mason's fault, for Hollywood's treatment of Brigadier Desmond Young's grand story is on the lines of Rommel's fight with the Hitler gang rather than with the 8<sup>th</sup> Army.' It was 'A film to see'<sup>928</sup>.

Others were much more critical. Simon Harcourt-Smith agreed with Mosley in his criticism of the portrayal of the German General Staff as 'an admirable machine of efficiency which left to itself would have proved invincible'. While acknowledging that Rommel may have been a clean and honourable fighter, he felt the film ignored the context within which he operated, in particular the Army's role in the rise of Hitler and the fact that the July conspirators were motivated not by disgust with Hitler's policies but anger because those policies failed<sup>929</sup>. Paul Holt, while admiring Mason's performance saw the film as 'special pleading' for the Field-Marshal. 'The men of the British Eighth Army may agree with this film. The women who lost their men may be more reluctant'<sup>930</sup>.

The film also provoked criticism from the general public. The *East London Advertiser* reported a protest from the East London Branch of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen who saw the film as 'glorify[ing] a ruthless enemy of Britain' and insulting a heavily bombed area of London and those who fought against Rommel. The Stepney Peace Council also criticised the film as 'the most bitter and humiliating insult which could be offered to the people of Stepney'<sup>931</sup>. The *Daily Worker* reported a number of demonstrations against the film by the Ex-Service Movement for Peace<sup>932</sup>, for example four ex-servicemen protested at the Odeon in Birmingham, linking the film to the

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<sup>928</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 12 October 1951.

<sup>929</sup> Simon Harcourt-Smith, *Sight and Sound*, Vol.21, No.3, 1 January 1952, p.134.

<sup>930</sup> Paul Holt, *Daily Herald*, 10 October 1951.

<sup>931</sup> *East London Advertiser*, 30 November 1951.

<sup>932</sup> Described by the Lord Chancellor as a Communist Party mouthpiece, *The Times*, 28 February 1951.



rearmament of Germany<sup>933</sup>: the paper also reported protests about the showing of the film in the U.S. Zone of western Germany at 'the latest American move to prepare the minds of West German people for war'<sup>934</sup>.

Young's book can be seen as part of a trend to rehabilitate the Wehrmacht, at least among a section of the British Establishment. As early as 1948 Basil Liddell Hart had published *The Other Side of the Hill*, which was based on a series of interviews he obtained with certain German generals. He was sympathetic, seeing '...many... were essentially technicians, intent on their professional job, and with little idea of things outside it. It is easy to see how Hitler hoodwinked and handled them, and found them good instruments up to a point'<sup>935</sup>. This echoes Young's view. By 1950, some were beginning to express concerns about the trials of professional soldiers, as opposed to those of members of the Nazi hierarchy, the SS and the Gestapo, or of more junior figures who could be directly connected to criminal activity. M.R.T. Paget, who defended von Manstein at his trial went so far as to write a book criticising the trial process. The book provoked a furious reaction from Cassandra. 'But the large issue is not Manstein's guilt ... but the whole question of what is called "the honour of the Germans"'. It is said that the worse they did was to obey orders...They were the willing agents for one of the worst set of criminals the world has ever seen...Not one of the German generals resigned, nor did any of them shrink from their horrible task of invading and pillaging every one of their neighbours... '<sup>936</sup>.

During the war there was a divergence of opinion, between those who regarded the German people as collectively guilty of the crimes of the Nazi regime, and those who

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<sup>933</sup> *Daily Worker*, 26 November 1951.

<sup>934</sup> *Daily Worker*, 19 January 1952.

<sup>935</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, London, Pan Books, 1999, pp. 7-8.

<sup>936</sup> Cassandra, *Daily Mirror*, 28 September 1951.

considered that a whole people cannot be condemned, the actions of each individual needed to be examined; the existence of the Nazi Party enabled those more sympathetic to the Germans to see the crimes committed during the Nazi period as totally the responsibility of the Nazis, not of the Germans in general. There were those who were prepared to forgive the ordinary German people once the war was over, and who regarded the Allied policy of demilitarisation, denazification and re-education as fitting the Germans for a future in a democratic western Europe; others considered that even after its catastrophic defeat during the war, Germany would rise again and once more pose a threat to European peace. The latter wanted Germany to be placed in a position where this was never again possible. The underlying division between the critics of both the Rommel book and film seems to reflect this split.

From shortly after the end of the war, the real enemy had been perceived by many to be the Communist bloc. British attitudes veered from an immediate post-war dismissal of any thought of re-establishing a German Army to a later recognition of the need for German troops to provide a front line of defence against the Soviet threat in central Europe. Although many Germans were opposed to rearmament, Adenauer was in favour of Germany's integration into any western alliance as a buffer against the USSR and as part of Germany's regaining of sovereignty after the occupation. In 1950 there was some opposition in Britain to any suggestion of a rearming of the defeated enemy; it was too soon after a bitter and hard-fought war. While not many would have agreed with Communist views in general, the accusation that the Rommel film was part of an orchestrated propaganda campaign to make the rearming of the enemy acceptable no doubt struck a chord.



The release of *Rommel – Desert Fox* provided a focus for all these discontents. It could never have at that time been regarded as just a good entertainment war film: its sympathetic portrayal of an enemy general, even one who was widely admired by those who fought against him, carried too much ideological baggage. The filmmakers seem to have been aware of the need to be diplomatic: Henry Hathaway, in a report relating to a dispute with a French union over *Rommel – Desert Fox* was quoted as saying: 'Our effort is not so much to tell the story of Rommel as to use the character of Rommel for telling a highly dramatic story of the destruction of a regime from within'<sup>937</sup>. This was echoed by Mason who described the film as 'a hearty, dramatic story of the destruction of a regime from within'<sup>938</sup>. Evidently it was considered desirable to downplay the sympathy of the portrayal of Rommel by implying it was placed in the context of a wider critique of Nazi Germany. From my own viewing of the film, I doubt very much if many of its audience saw it as revealing 'the destruction of a regime from within'. Certainly Hitler is shown as interfering disastrously in the military decisions of his generals and is portrayed as a ranting maniac, focusing on his terror weapons rather than the immediate military difficulties; so it could be argued that the film shows that the regime is rotten at the core. However, the structure of the film, and its ending with the death of its protagonist after a failed *coup d'état* emphasises the resilience of the regime rather than its downfall.

*Rommel – Desert Fox* was not official propaganda, however much its subject matter might coincide with changing political views: it was a commercial film trading on the popularity of a best-selling biography. It could be seen as reflecting softening attitudes to the Germans which occurred in the post-war period. Young's view was representative of that of many of the soldiers who had fought against Rommel, as the

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<sup>937</sup> *Today's Cinema*, vol.76, no.6204, 7 March 1951, p.7.

<sup>938</sup> *Picturegoer*, vol.21, no.841, 16 June 1951, p.15.

material in the IWM shows, and they would have been part of the film's target audience. Despite the criticisms made of it, neither Young's book nor the subsequent film shy away from Rommel's admiration of and support for Hitler, but imply that this was mitigated by his subsequent association, however loosely, with the July Plot to remove Hitler from power, and by his subsequent death at the hands of the Nazi regime. In a way, Rommel's Nazi associations could be ignored because he (and the Afrika Korps) did not fit into the accepted model of how a Nazi was supposed to act: he observed the Geneva Conventions; he was personally chivalrous (to use Young's word); he could easily be characterised as an honest, apolitical professional soldier doing his duty to his country in impossible circumstances. If 1951 was too early for some to depict a German point-of-view in the mass medium of film, nevertheless, as certain of the reviewers quoted above knew, many ex-soldiers would not disagree with the portrayal on screen of a man they regarded as a hero, even if he was fighting on the other side.

British films made in the post-war period can be seen as shifting from the view of the Germans as a faceless enemy mass, to depicting Germans as individuals. In some films the audience was invited to empathise with a German protagonist. The easiest way for a film-maker to depict a German sympathetically was to focus on a young, defenceless-seeming woman, the antithesis of the common German stereotype, as Dearden did in *Frieda*. Significantly in that film the soldier-brother is a Nazi. As time passed it became possible to acknowledge that British and German could work together, as is indicated in *Portrait from Life* and shown explicitly in *The Man Between*. Later films could show German men as flawed but not monsters, Ivo in *The Man Between*, or as sympathetic individuals in their own right, Kastner in *The Man Between*, Franz in *The Divided Heart*. The pre-war image of the honourable German was resurrected, as the



Kommandant in *The Colditz Story*. By 1958 it was possible to make a film starring a German actor, Hardy Kruger, playing a successful German escapee from British custody. Criticism of sympathetic portrayals of Germans came mainly from the Left; the link of the rehabilitation of the Germans in a popular mass medium with a changing political situation was noted and criticised at the time by those opposed to the anti-Communist stance of NATO.

However, it is noticeable that films sympathetic to the Germans ignore, explicitly or implicitly, the question of individual German responsibility for the atrocities of the Third Reich. In *Frieda*, Robert suggests to Frieda, after their viewing of the concentration camp newsreel, that they must forget about it or their relationship will be doomed; in *The Man Between*, Ivo admits to taking part in atrocities, but Susanne is prepared to overlook this because 'you were ordered'. In *The Divided Heart*, Inga and Franz's actions during the Nazi period are not discussed, apparently considered irrelevant to the story of their suffering the loss of their child. Reconciliation appeared to require that such subjects were avoided. The removal from office and prosecution of those directly involved in atrocities, insofar as they could be identified, allowed the question of the collaboration or participation of the wider population to be ignored.

## CONCLUSION

Margaret Kertesz's thesis and John Ramsden's survey of British attitudes both show that there was a well defined stereotype of the Germans which prevailed before, during and after the wartime period. Kertesz's thesis demonstrates that the views of the ordinary civilian were not necessarily antagonistic to the Germans, in contrast to the strong anti-German attitudes discernible in newspaper coverage of the war. Public opinion varied according to the fortunes of war – German successes were associated with British hatred of the Germans, German setbacks with a softening of public opinion. While the revelations of the conditions in Belsen and other concentration camps heralded an upsurge in anti-German feeling, this was soon softened by awareness of the scale of the German defeat and the awfulness of conditions in post-war Germany. Ramsden traces this more friendly approach throughout the 1950s and 1960s, with a hardening of attitudes as the 1970s approached.

There seems to be a general perception that soldiers hated the enemy, a view nicely summed up in the opinion that 'the only good German is a dead one'. This has been the most common reaction over the last eight years whenever I have mentioned the subject of my research, often followed by the story of a relative who felt this way. However, examination of the IWM material indicates that views were more nuanced than this. There were those who hated the Germans. Many voiced no particular opinion: this may indicate antagonism; an acceptance that the Germans were as they were portrayed, militaristic, aggressive, brutal, and so on; or even indifference – it did not matter what Germans were like as a nation or as individuals, what was important was getting on with winning the war. However, others could take a more friendly



attitude to the Germans they came across, in some cases lasting friendships could be formed. Initial hostility could be broken down.

All the literature and the IWM papers indicate that the war in North Africa was generally regarded as a reasonably 'gentlemanly' affair. Inevitably there were dissenters, notably Ian Bell, but he is in the minority. Both sides were believed to act in accordance with 'the laws of war'; in general those taken prisoner by the Germans considered they had been treated fairly. Generous gestures by the captor Germans towards their British captives are recorded, often contrasting such 'decent' behaviour on the part of the Germans with ill-treatment experienced at the hands of the Italians – many British prisoners exhibit a real contempt for the Italians both as fighters and as captors. There seems to have been an almost hero-worship of Rommel, as Young's biography indicates; many appear to have had a higher regard for the German Field Marshal than for their own generals, despite his loyalty to Hitler and his support for Nazism, at least until his country began to lose the war. His involvement, however peripheral, in the July Plot and his personal leadership approach – the comment that the German soldier fought cleanly and fairly in North Africa –perhaps were regarded as exonerating him from the taint of Nazi associations, and as Bierman and Smith indicate, he provided a unifying figure for both Afrika Korps veterans and Desert Rats. He is probably the only German Second World War general that many British people could name.

How prisoners-of-war regarded Germans seems to have been related to some extent to how they were treated. Some of those who experienced particularly harsh treatment, such as the many prisoners who were taken in northern France in 1940 or those involved in forced marches from camps in the east of Germany or Poland to the west in

1945, displayed a strong hostility towards their captors: the sight of German atrocities towards occupied countries' civilians could have a similar effect. This was not inevitable, as Osborne's memoir shows. Officers may have had a greater dislike of those holding them prisoner than did the other ranks although it is impossible to generalise from such a small sample.

Personal contact with Germans could result in friendly relationships being established. During the war, some prisoners made friends with their captors, as Moore did with Hans Korzelius and Blewitt and his comrade with the two unnamed German soldiers and with Willy. Those other ranks and NCOs who were called upon to work for their captors could get on well with some of the civilians they found themselves among. Osborne and Asquith indicate this. Prisoners and guards could be involved in 'trading'; opinion varied as to this practice. Osborne voiced his amused admiration for German skill at 'fiddles'; others regarded such German behaviour as proof of the mercenary nature and immorality of their captors.

Examination of the IWM papers indicates factors which could, in the post-war period, be the basis for Anglo-German co-operation, even friendship. A stereotyped view of the enemy did not necessarily go hand in hand with an abiding hatred. Eke saw the enemy very much in terms of Us and Them, an attitude which continued even after the end of the war. During the war he and his comrades felt a burning hatred of enemy prisoners, offended by the German habit of smartening themselves up before marching into captivity under 'good order and military discipline'. Implicit in Eke's description of his and his fellows' reaction to such behaviour – a deep hatred and the throwing of mud at the enemy, presumably to dirty their clothing – is an assumption that the defeated Germans were not showing an appropriate response to their situation. They



should have looked tired, dispirited and 'browned-off', to use the jargon of the time; attempts to look ordered and disciplined seem to have been interpreted as arrogance. Even in the post-war period, Eke interpreted German behaviour very much in terms of the stereotype, as his description of the hunting expedition shows: the German is still seen as essentially a soldier while Eke sees himself as the quintessential civilian who just happens to be in uniform. However, the two men can share an afternoon up the mountain, the German is trusted with a gun and, when a target is sighted, a bullet to shoot the deer with, and a companionable discussion before the walk back. He also admired German courage. Miller's anecdote about the overbearing NCO indicates another aspect of the stereotype, it could be very comforting, a way of belittling an enemy who had until then seemed too admirable.

Those soldiers who fought against the Germans in northern Europe from D Day until the German surrender, and who then found themselves as part of the occupying Army in Germany itself, did not share their North African colleagues' experience of fighting a gentlemanly war. Unlike the sparsely populated desert, France, the Low Countries and Germany itself were highly populated areas. The sweeping advances of the desert campaign were replaced by the need to fight hard for small gains. While the grim stalemate of the First World War was avoided, German resistance was determined and the Allied forces lost many men. The civilians caught in the middle suffered greatly, as *A Bridge Too Far* vividly shows. However, after the German surrender, fighting men found themselves in a position analogous to that of the Germans in occupied Europe, responsible for the welfare of the families of the men they had been trying to kill a short time before.

Many elements combined to bias the views of the soldier entering Germany against the people of that country. Official British propaganda was one: the B.W.P. booklets and the handbook for occupation forces reinforced the stereotyped view of the Germans, warning the soldier to beware of 'the strange enemy people' he would find himself amongst. Awareness of the ill-treatment by the Germans of the people of the occupied countries was often cited as a reason for lack of sympathy for German suffering. The Germans were seen to have lived well at the expense of their conquered territories and there was awareness of German atrocities in the occupied countries. Soldiers experienced the death or serious injury of comrades; German atrocities towards British or American troops; particularly brutal behaviour on the part of German fighters; some were concerned about the possibility of the next generation having to fight another war against the same enemy. The horrors of the concentration camps liberated by the British, Belsen and Sandbostel among them, shocked those who saw them, and the others who heard about them; Germans could be regarded as the 'bastards' who would be prepared to imprison their countrymen in such conditions.

However the IWM material reveals other elements which could, in time, lead towards reconciliation between the British and their erstwhile enemies. One peculiar to servicemen was the feeling of British and Germans being 'brothers in arms. Many soldiers testify to their belief that the Germans were coerced into supporting the Nazis, or were at least afraid to express their reservations about the regime. Whether such pressure was seen as emanating from the Gestapo and the S.S. or through fear of denunciation by their neighbours, the fact that opposition could result in death or time in a concentration camp with all the horrors which that involved was accepted by many. Some encountered vivid examples of the nature and effect of Nazi propaganda, as Jupp's story concerning the shooting of children shows; the way young Germans were



subject to indoctrination was mentioned by Charters. Similarly many believed those Germans who claimed not to have known what went on in concentration camps; others were more sceptical. Soldiers would be particularly aware of the difficulty for any serving German to raise doubts about the Nazis; to the pressures experienced by the civilian was added the social pressure of the military organisation: ultimately the soldier fights for his comrades, not 'King and country'; it is a very brave man who risks falling out with those comrades.

Those who entered Germany in 1945 came into a country mainly populated by the old, women and children. German servicemen were rounded up as prisoners-of-war. The British soldier found himself among people who were not at all like the militaristic, belligerent, brutal hordes of official propaganda. The feared German resistance from 'Werewolves' did not materialise. This did not remove fears that the war would have to be fought again by the next generation, but it was immediately obvious to the occupiers that German defeat was total. The civilians the soldiers dealt with did not generally fit the stereotype: it is difficult to apply the model of a brutal and aggressive enemy to an obviously frightened and docile population. There were still those who regarded the whole German people as tainted, as Blackburn's comment about the children's 'little Nazi hands' indicates; Cope noted the patriarchal nature of German society in the attitude of the men towards the women, which he compared to that of men in the Middle Eastern countries he served in; he also considered that the only way to avoid another war was the extermination of Germans (or possibly just of German men). However, his antipathy did not prevent him writing in fairly friendly terms of his piano teacher, a woman: his comment about the treatment of women would indicate that he saw them as victims not oppressors.

The criticisms of the non-fraternisation policy indicate that many soldiers wanted to interact with Germans, although the desire for sexual relations with German women may have been the overriding motive; several sources remark on the difficulty of ignoring children. Evans' account suggests that the policy was ignored by many. Others were concerned that the reasons for the policy had not been explained to the Germans, and that therefore Allied motives for such aloofness would be misinterpreted. Several sources indicate that friendly relationships quickly developed between occupiers and occupied, both before and after the relaxation of the policy. Those charged with administering the British Zone found the denazification policy difficult to put into practice, they were very aware of the intricacies of the situation and the varying degree of enthusiasm with which people adopted Party membership. As Nunn commented, putting policy into effect was a very different thing from devising it; he noted the difference in attitude between those back home and those who had to administer the policies 'on the ground'. Nunn's comments also indicate a certain sympathy with the more nominal Nazis, and suggest that he found those with bureaucratic skills and trifling Nazi connections more congenial to deal with than the guaranteed anti-Nazi socialists and communists with no administrative experience.

The degree of German deprivation and suffering in the years immediately after the war was regarded by some as functioning as an act of repentance, offsetting the ill-treatment by the Germans of the inhabitants of the countries which they occupied. Germans suffered expulsion from the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia and East Prussia, which was given to Poland to compensate her for Polish land ceded to the Russians; many of the refugees in Germany in the immediate aftermath of the war were Germans turned out of land on which they had lived for centuries. This is an aspect of the post-war settlement which tends to be ignored now.



To these factors can be added the political changes at the end of the war. The wartime alliance with the USSR began to break down almost as soon as the guns stopped firing, and the Cold War can be seen in full force during the Berlin Blockade of 1948-1949, which turned the inhabitants of Hitler's capital into the plucky defenders of democracy. Growing hostility between east and west resulted in the virtual division of Germany into the western zones which became the Federal Republic, and the Communist east; it was symbolised by the currency reforms of 1948 which helped to precipitate the Blockade. Germany became an ally in the fight against Soviet expansion. The British in particular, who suffered considerable economic problems in the immediate post-war period, were keen to find means of reducing expenditure on the occupation; the reinstatement of the German army in 1955 was a means of lowering the number of British troops needed in central Europe. Germany could once again contribute to her own defence, a situation not universally popular in 'warlike' Germany. Those who saw the division of Germany into small states as a means of curbing German aggression got something of what they wanted, a Germany divided into two, an effective diminution of her power.

In the case of films, pre-war censorship regulations prevented any strongly anti-German narratives from reaching the screen; this extended to any criticism of Nazi internal policy in Germany, unless heavily disguised as in *Jew Süss* or some of Hitchcock's 1930s thrillers. The depiction of the effects of the Nazi takeover of a small village in *Pastor Hall* was not passed by the censor until after the outbreak of war in 1939.

Films made during the 1930s featuring German characters tended to be set in the period of the First World War. Focussing on such a period might be interpreted as inherently

Germanophobic: responsibility for the terrible losses of the war was ascribed to the influence of militant Prussianism, a characteristic which was linked to the Nazi regime. Films which dealt with Edith Cavell or similar stories could be seen as anti-German, dealing as they do with the harsh treatment of an apparently helpless woman. However other films showed the Germans in a more favourable light. *Brown on Resolution* could be regarded as containing an anti-war message in its depiction of the equality of suffering on both sides, and was considered by some of the critics to take such a stance. In both *Dark Journey* and *The Spy in Black*, Conrad Veidt played the part of an honourable German. This is less marked in *Dark Journey*, where Von Marwitz is initially shown as a philanderer, operating as a spy within a sinister and ruthless German spy network in neutral Sweden; however by the end of the film he is shown as a naval officer, albeit in the hated U-boat service; Madeleine's falling in love with him and apparent willingness to wait for him until the war is over indicates that she bears him no grudge (with the implication that the audience should not either). In *The Spy in Black*, which is told from the German rather than the British viewpoint, Hardt is honourable, moral and decent, and his crew are a likeable bunch (although again part of the U-boat war); it is the British who are devious, cunning and underhand. The British agent, Mrs. Blacklock, shows distress at Hardt's death at the end of the film. Again the equality of risk and potential suffering on both sides is emphasised. In *Sons of the Sea*, the German agent passes quite easily as an Englishman (although he is also shown as devious and ruthless, part of a slick and efficient German spy network); however after capture he behaves in an honourable fashion, ensuring that Philip's name is cleared, and facing his inevitable execution with insouciance. Even Hitchcock's *The Secret Agent*, although it features a thoroughly unpleasant German agent who flirts with the apparently married heroine and kills opponents without any compassion, is less determinedly anti-German than might first appear. The German agent is depicted as an



American, even after he has been unmasked; it is only right at the end of the film that his German character is emphasised. While the German may be brutal, the British are shown as not much better. They employ a psychopath as an assassin; on the flimsiest of evidence they kill an innocent man, Caypor. Caypor's wife may be German, but during the intercutting of the scenes of the climb up the mountain which will end in Caypor's death, and Mrs. Caypor's growing distress at the actions of Caypor's dog, the suffering to which she, an innocent third party, is exposed is made clear to the audience. While such restrained attitudes may be seen as due to BBFC intervention, the fact that some of these films were very popular as late as 1939 (*The Spy in Black*) suggests that British audiences had no strong objection to the portrayal on screen of a good German.

With the outbreak of war the rules changed, and the MoI eventually decided that a 'hate campaign' was required to stir up anti-German feeling – itself evidence that British views were not perceived as strongly anti-German. A change in the BBFC attitude enabled *Pastor Hall* to be made; *Freedom Radio* is a later film also dealing with the conditions in Germany leading to the rise of the Nazi Party. Although critically acclaimed and government supported, *Pastor Hall* was no box office success, and neither was the more melodramatic *Freedom Radio*. Both films portray the German people as deceived and intimidated into acquiescence of the Nazi regime; opposition is dealt with harshly, and the main opponents of the regime in each case are killed.

Many films depicted stereotyped views of the German enemy; this is exemplified in the early *The Lion Has Wings*, a propaganda film which was criticised as such by the public. The German U-boat service is shown as deceitful, brutal and ruthless (and this was indeed how it was regarded as Evans' comments show) in both *Convoy* and *Western Approaches*. The Germans attack merchant vessels with a shocking disregard for the lives of women and children and are ready to use innocent civilians to trap the

British Navy. British submarines, on the other hand, attack military targets, as in *We Dive at Dawn*. Spy thrillers show the Germans as capable of passing for British, while exhibiting the usual characteristics of brutality and ruthlessness; there is emphasis on a German spy network operating efficiently in Britain (in fact there was little German espionage activity in Britain during the Second World War), for example in *Untold Story* and *The Next of Kin*. *Went the Day Well?* depicts the treatment the British could expect should the Germans invade, while comfortingly reassuring in its portrayal of final British victory. Again German officers pass easily as British until unmasked. There is an underlying message in all these films: Germans may be able to look like British people, but they are very different under the surface, an approach which is touched on in the soldiers' handbook. Films set in occupied Europe emphasise German ill-treatment of the civilians of the occupied countries, and the bravery of resisters (*The Day Will Dawn*, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*). The comedy-thriller, *Night Train to Munich* takes a rather different view of the Germans; much fun is had with the stereotype when Dickie Randall impersonates a typical Prussian military officer, complete with monocle. Many of the Germans are portrayed as inefficient, rather bumbling officials. The intimidation of the ordinary German is hinted at, and the ordinary German people behave politely to the British. However the main German character, Karl Marsen, is ruthless, harsh and dangerous although not without charm and courage.

Powell and Pressburger produced two films during the war which showed good Germans. In the earlier *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*, supported by the MoI, there is a careful depiction of various different types of German, from the Nazi thug through the Old Comrade to the dedicated ideologue. There is also Vogel, the basically decent man who is used to explain how many Germans were forced into Party membership. Anton Walbrook plays Peter, the leader of the German Hutterites, good, admirable people. Peter is given



a strong speech condemning Nazi attitudes and contradicting Hirt's assumption that all Germans are one; it is a powerful argument that Germans should be seen as individuals, not regarded as automatically tainted by their nationality. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* also shows a good German, Theo, who is depicted initially a charming and happy-go-lucky young Uhlan officer; then an embittered prisoner-of-war; finally as a refugee from the Nazi regime. Again he makes a ringing declaration of the evils of Nazism and the way in which ordinary people such as himself could be deluded into ignoring the excesses of the regime until, in his case, it was almost too late. However, one should not overemphasise these films' deviation from the commonly accepted cinematic depiction of Germans. In each case the good German is either a refugee from Germany or ends up killed by the Nazis; while these films could be read as requiring Germans to be treated as individuals, responsible for their own actions not those of their government, it is also possible to see both these films as indicating that opposition to the Nazis had either been driven out of Germany or been eliminated; thus those Germans remaining were guilty by association.

The end of the war saw the need for a change in British attitudes: the British became the occupiers, the Germans as the underdogs, and the need to keep the population of their zone alive entailed the British making sacrifices to feed their former enemies. The gradually developing stand-off with the Russians in the post-war period brought about a change of emphasis: the Germans in the western zones became valuable allies against the new Soviet enemy. A degree of reconciliation began which was reflected in changed depictions in films.

In the initial post-war period, Germans were still the enemy in spy films, as in *I See a Dark Stranger* and *Counterblast*. However, the former film was a romantic comedy, although the German spy, Miller, retains many of the characteristics of the spy in the wartime film; easily passing as British, courageous, ruthless, dying with a jest upon his

lips. He is played as a serious character, in contrast to the madcap heroine, Bridie. The other Germans in the film form the usual spy network, though not so efficient that they cannot be defeated by a British intelligence officer and a naïve Irish girl. The film was successful and admired by some of the critics. The latter film shows the Germans operating undercover in post-war Britain with a view to reestablishing a Nazi regime in Germany through the use of biological warfare. However in this film the German spy, while ruthless and relatively efficient, is not the dedicated German of the wartime pictures. He seems to have a personal motive for his work; he does not pass quite so easily as a typical Britisher, being seen by many who come in contact with him as 'odd'; he is susceptible to the charms of a young woman, Tracy; and by the end of the film is prepared to offer his services to the highest bidder. The film was heavily criticised by its few reviewers, being seen as out-of-date. When the spy film revived in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the enemy was the Soviet Union.

Early post-war Resistance films still showed the Germans as simply ruthless oppressors and the occupied as either resisters or collaborators (*Against the Wind*). However, *Odette* in 1950 took a more nuanced view. While many Germans are simply the enemy, Odette's nemesis, Henri, is characterised more subtly. He is not simply a brutal, ruthless opponent: he is a flawed human being, anti-Nazi but perhaps not prepared to stand up to the regime; he admires Odette and appears to regret having had to capture her. Father Paul, the priest, is shown as doing his best for those in his charge in very difficult circumstances. While the brutalities of the Nazi regime are emphasised in Odette's torture by the Gestapo and her experiences in Ravensbruck, the distinction between the 'good' German and the 'nasty' Nazi can be seen to revive. This depiction of the German as a flawed but fundamentally redeemable human being can be seen also in Powell and Pressburger's *Ill Met by Moonlight*. They also recapitulated the



character of Hardt in Captain Langsdorff in *The Battle of the River Plate*. This film was a Royal Command performance and was a box-office success.

Prisoner-of-war films began to be made in the post-war period. *The Captive Heart*, despite its melodramatic love story element, was a generally sober and realistic portrayal of the day-to-day life of those held by the Germans. Forster, the Gestapo agent, is shown as menacing, a polite, smooth operator bent on identifying Captain Hasek; but the ordinary German soldiers and officers are a background presence, not necessarily particularly threatening or malevolent. The German doctor is characterised briefly as a heavily humorous but friendly man. The same portrayal can be seen in *The Wooden Horse*, which also shows British escapees among the ordinary German populace. However *The Colditz Story* of 1954 is a return to the pre-war conventions of the genre, with its German Kommandant a good man, anxious to avoid 'unnecessary bloodshed', and even its security office, Priem, depicted as a relatively decent sort. While some Germans are still arrogant and harsh, the main German characters have sympathetic qualities.

*Frieda*, made in 1947, was critically admired by some, and popular at the box office. It is, in melodramatic form, a discussion of the correct way to treat the Germans, and thus can be loosely described as a film covering the subject of the occupation; it juxtaposes the extreme Vansittart view with the more pragmatic approach of re-educating and reforming the German people. The extreme of treating all Germans as equally guilty is explicitly associated with Nazi racist views, and its conclusion is that its innocent heroine should be forgiven and accepted into British society. The film is, however, much more ambivalent about how to deal with the German serviceman, personified by Frieda's Nazi brother; his fate is to be beaten up by Robert, the hero, and handed over to British justice for a war crime. It acknowledges that Rikki's acceptance of Nazi ideas may be associated with the brain-washing he has received as a boy growing up

under Hitler's regime. While the film rejects the idea of collective guilt, it also rather overlooks the extent to which the ordinary German might be in some way responsible for the acts of his or her government, and underplays the degree of compulsion which could be applied to individuals who showed any deviation from support of the Nazi regime, issues which are dealt with in the less popular *Pastor Hall* and *Freedom Radio* (and which are touched on in *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel*). While there is just a slight implication of equality of suffering of both sides (the Dawsons have lost a family member, Alan, and Frieda's parents have been killed in an air raid), the concept discernible in some IWM papers, that the Germans had suffered badly during and immediately after the war and thus had atoned for some of their crimes, is not considered.

Some later films are set in occupied Germany: *Portrait from Life* contains a Nazi character, Hendlmann, who is shown as a rather brutal bully, cowing his 'wife and daughter' and ready to beat up a fellow camp inmate for helping the British major with his enquiries. Other Germans are, however, shown as victims of the war, forced to become refugees and desperately searching for a home away from the camps; or working in co-operation with the British in an atmosphere of mutual respect. In 1953 *The Man Between* was set in occupied Berlin. It shows a happy marriage between a British major and a German woman, British and German authorities working in harmony, a heroic German who brings both people and information from the east to the west of Berlin. Its hero is a flawed German criminal, Ivo; initially portrayed as blackmailing Bettina, the British major's wife, and as a petty crook, he later shows himself to be a tragic hero. He explains how an idealistic young lawyer found himself an 'efficient unit in the German military machine'; how he may have participated in atrocities; how he fell into criminal activity at the end of the war. This deeply cynical man falls in love with the innocent young heroine, and she with him; she is prepared to overlook his misdeeds, seeming to excuse his behaviour on the grounds he was obeying



orders; the film ends with his sacrificing himself to save the girl and Kastner, the crosser of borders. The 'bad' Germans in this film are in the east, encapsulated in the character of Hälendar, a kidnapper who pressurises Susanne. There is a Cold War dimension in the transposition of the bad German into East Berlin. By 1954, in *The Divided Heart*, a German couple could be portrayed as the victims of the Hitler regime almost as much as the oppressed peoples of occupied Yugoslavia. In 1958, *The One that Got Away* had a German escaper from the British as its hero.

During the late 1940s and 1950s, the picture of Germans seen by the British people shifted from an anti-German portrayal to Germans as good allies, even heroes in their own right. Some films maintained the wartime imagery, such as *Theirs is the Glory* or the much later *Sea of Sand* (Guy Green, 1958), where the desert war is shown in terms of heroic British members of the Long Range Desert Group against brutal German opponents. While this can be regarded as a reflection of changing political circumstances, it also illustrates that British antagonism to the German people as a whole was not permanent. Even during the war there were those, both civilian and service personnel, who refused to regard all Germans as alike, who distinguished between the good and the bad individual. As the full extent of the disaster which the Nazi regime had brought to Germany was revealed, some ceased to blame all Germans for the evils inflicted on the occupied countries and on the Jewish and other minority populations of Europe. As examination of the IWM evidence and Margaret Kertesz's analysis of the Mass-Observation evidence indicates, there were factors in the way people thought about the Germans which could, in a post-war atmosphere, allow of reconciliation. Film-makers were also able to use such factors to produce more sympathetic portrayals of Germans, perhaps also influencing those British people who saw the films into a more friendly attitude towards their former enemies.

The British attitude began to change in the early 1970s, as Ramsden shows. Television, the new mass entertainment medium, showed films, series and documentaries about the Second World War, concentrating on the activities of the German forces, the Gestapo and SS, and the Holocaust. One reason for this change might be that the younger generation had no experience of war and the compromises which fighting requires; the West Germans were by this time an economically successful nation, outperforming the British. The memory of the suffering of the Germans at the end of the war and in the early years of the peace, which for many of those who were part of the early occupation force in conquered Germany formed payment for German sins, was expunged; they could be seen as a people who had committed mass murder, devastated those European countries which they occupied, and who were now 'getting away with it', dominating Europe yet again through economic success and through the Common Market. The private opinions of those who had experienced the war and felt little or no malice towards the enemy were not heard.

Constraints of time and space limited to amount of research able to be undertaken and the IWM papers and films which could be discussed. I would like the opportunity for further research into the occupation period, and the experiences of those who were involved in this 'on the ground'. There is further material in the IWM archive which could be explored. It would also be interesting to explore further the depiction of Germans in British films, looking at the period from the latter part of the 1950s through to the present day, perhaps also including non-factual television programmes covering the wartime and immediate post-war period.



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K.W. Morris (87/44/1)

Dr. A.N.L. Munby (87/25/1)

Lieutenant-Colonel R.H.L. Nunn (Conshelf)

M.E. Osborne (88/55/1)

Kenneth A. Searle (92/31/1)

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